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CHARLOTTE MARY YONGE

Dedicated to

ARTHUR W. HOPKINSON



CHARLOTTE YONGE, ÆT. 21

CHARLOTTE MARY YONGE

The Story of an Uneventful Life

by

GEORGINA BATTISCOMBE

With an Introduction by

E. M. DELAFIELD

With Illustrations and Genealogies

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CHARLOTTE YONGE, aet. 21. Frontispiece

From a copy, in the possession of St. Swithun's School, Winchester, of the watercolour by George Richmond, 1844, in the National Portrait Gallery; by permission of the Gallery authorities and the Governing Body of St. Swithun's School.

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From a drawing by John Bacon, Junior. By permission of Messrs. Macmillan & Co.

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From a sketch. By permission of Messrs. A. R. Mowbray & Co.
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From a watercolour by Charlotte Yonge. Circ. 1859. By permission of the Vicar and Church Council of Hartpury.

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From a photograph. By permission of Messrs. Macmillan & Co.

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CHARLOTTE YONGE IN ELDERFIELD GARDEN WITH HER GIRLS' SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASS. Circ. 1872. Face p. 144

By permission of Miss Hawkins.

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GENEALOGIES

The Yonge Family Tree

The Bargus-Colborne-Yonge Connection

(at end of book)

AUTHOR'S NOTE

THE WOULD-BE BIOGRAPHER of Charlotte Yonge is faced with an extraordinary paucity of material. The shortage of letters and original manuscripts perhaps explains the fact that, with the exception of the short *Appreciation* published by Mrs. Romanes in 1908, no book dealing with Miss Yonge has appeared since the publication of Miss Christabel Coleridge's *Charlotte Mary Yonge: Her Life and Letters*, the official biography written as long ago as 1903.

As Miss Yonge's literary executor Miss Coleridge had access to all letters, papers and manuscripts. When her own book was finished she appears to have destroyed all this invaluable first-hand material, thus complicating immensely the work of any future biographer, who is deprived of any means of checking Miss Coleridge's statements by reference to the original sources of information which she had at her disposal. In the circumstances Miss Coleridge's book must be the basis of any biography of Miss Yonge and the starting-point of all research. I am very grateful to Messrs. Macmillan for permission to make free use of it and to reproduce various letters and extracts; and also for permission to reproduce extracts from *Two Generations* by Mr. Osbert Sitwell. I would call the attention of my readers to the list of Miss Yonge's works supplied by Miss Coleridge in an Appendix.

Fortunately, however, the destruction of first-hand material was not so complete as was at first supposed. The passage of time has brought to light valuable material which was not available to Miss Coleridge, and has also made it permissible to print matter which she considered too personal for publication. Miss Yonge's letters to Miss Coleridge herself are in the possession of Mrs. G. H. Gair, who has kindly allowed me to print several which have never been previously published.

Mrs. Gair's sister, the late Mrs. H. B. Gair, was kind enough to give me two unpublished essays by Miss Coleridge in which she allowed herself to be more frank and critical than in the published biography. I am also grateful to her for the gift of several volumes of *The Barnacle*, the manuscript magazine produced by the Gosling Society under the editorship of Miss Yonge.

The late Miss C. M. Ridding, who was the author of a most interesting article on Miss Yonge appearing in the *Girton Review*, presented to Girton College Library a series of letters and memoranda written by Sir William Heathcote, and including the letter from Mr. Austen Leigh printed on

page 93. My thanks are due to the Mistress and Fellows for permission to see these papers and to print portions of them, and also for permission to print the letter from Miss Yonge to Miss Emily Davies. Other letters have been lent to me by Miss Ruth Robertson and Miss Dorothea Wood. The important series of hitherto unpublished letters written to Miss Smith came by chance into the possession of Miss E. M. Delafield, who has kindly allowed me to make use of them.

Many people have been kind enough to help me with reminiscences of Miss Yonge based either on their own memories or on the recollections of friends and relations now dead. I would like to thank especially Mrs. Beloe, Miss Du Boulay, Mrs. A. T. P. Williams, Katharine Lady Baker-Wilbraham, Miss Joyce Baker-Wilbraham, Miss Dorothy Clark, and Miss Hawkins, who has also allowed me to reproduce the photograph of Miss Yonge with her class of schoolgirls. Much useful assistance and information has come from Miss Alicia Percival and Miss Margaret Mare, Mr. H. M. Gilbert, the Rev. A. W. Hopkinson, Mrs. Van Oss, Mr. A. C. Stroud, Canon S. P. T. Prideaux, D.D., and the Headmistress and Secretary of St. Swithun's School, formerly the Winchester Church High School for Girls. I am most grateful also to Miss Fryn Tennyson-Jesse for her kindness in reading the manuscript and for her valuable help and criticism, and to Mrs. Fry for her help in proof-reading.

My thanks are due to Messrs Macmillan for permission to reproduce letters and extracts from *Dulce Domum*, a book of reminiscences of the Moberly family compiled by Miss C. A. E. Moberly; also to Messrs. Methuen, Messrs. Mowbray, and the Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge for similar permission with regard to *John Keble* by Dr. Walter Lock, *Charlotte Mary Yonge: an Appreciation* by Mrs. Romanes, and *Edward Stuart Talbot* by Lady Stephenson; and finally to the Secretary of the Mothers' Union for permission to reprint various passages from Miss Yonge's Autobiography and other articles appearing originally in *Mothers in Council*.

Like all lovers of Miss Yonge, I owe my last and greatest debt of gratitude to Miss E. M. Delafield, whose knowledge and enthusiasm are unequalled. The existence of this book is due in great part to her help and encouragement.

ROYAL MILITARY COLLEGE, CAMBERLEY, 1940.
FULBROOK, 1942.

INTRODUCTION

By E. M. DELAFIELD

CHARLOTTE YONGE, late in her long life, wrote down some charming, vivid reminiscences of her childhood. They form part of this book, and they provide almost the whole of the material available for analysis of her as a person. She differs from the great majority of novelists because, in none of her many books, with two exceptions, did she ever project any version, idealised or otherwise, of herself.

The exceptions are *Countess Kate* and *Abbeychurch*. Countess Kate was quite certainly Charlotte as a child; the description that Charlotte gives of herself in the autobiographical fragment is practically identical with the one that she gives of Kate. Both were dark, restless, eager little girls, afflicted with high and shrill voices, lacking in manual dexterity, and given to violent passions. Both were always ready to devour information, especially when it concerned literature, history or mythology, and both displayed more zeal than discretion in expecting other people to share the enthusiasms in and out of season. When Countess Kate makes a too-brief reappearance, grown-up, as a subsidiary character in *The Pillars of the House*, she is developed exactly as we know that Charlotte herself developed: "Petrified, all save her great eyes, by shyness. . . . Eyes and tongue full of architecture, romance and history, even spying and identifying a heraldic badge that supplied a missing link in the history of the building. She had an unusual number of interests and was intensely eager about each in turn. She liked nothing so well as a kind of discussion on character . . . plentifully interlarded with historical or fictitious allusions; but she did not often get the opportunity, for her historical tastes were so much more vivid than most of her contemporaries, that she always had to guard against seeming pedantic."

Every word of this description is applicable to Charlotte, as is made perfectly clear in her few direct references to herself, either in correspondence, recorded conversations, or, once or twice, in the autobiographical fragment, when she admits that certain characteristics "remained with her throughout adult life."

The only other book in which it seems to me possible to detect Charlotte under another name is *Abbeychurch*, her first published novel, written at the age of twenty. There, the heroine, Elizabeth Woodbourne, is the embodiment of Charlotte's tastes, enthusiasms and aspirations, rather than of her personality. Certainly, Elizabeth is self-willed, warm-

hearted, intolerant and agonisingly shy, but except for those attributes, she remains a kind of young and ardent encyclopaedia, rather than a character seen in the round.

The author, in the preface to the 1872 edition, makes the following significant observation :

“I have lived long enough to be somewhat ashamed of the exuberant outpouring of historical allusions, which, however, was perfectly natural amongst the set of girls from whom my experience was taken.”

No one reading of Charlotte’s youthful visits to the Yonge family at Puslinch will doubt the identity of the “set of girls.”

In these two stories only, then, to my mind are to be found any self-projection of Charlotte as she saw herself, for she was possessed of that cast-iron sincerity that is utterly destructive of the more subtle forms of vanity, and that made her wholly incapable of even unconscious self-dramatisation. Countess Kate is a candid and balanced self-portrait of Charlotte at eleven years old, Elizabeth Woodbourne an epitome of Charlotte’s likes and dislikes as a young girl.

Why should so intelligent a woman, whose delineation of character was always true to life within the limitations of her experience, have drawn entirely upon imagination and apparently not at all upon the far more valuable material that is evolved from within, when writing about human beings, their faults and virtues, joys, sorrows and affections? I believe the reason—and it is psychologically a most interesting one—to be that Charlotte Yonge, who lived to be seventy-seven years old, remained emotionally fixed in adolescence.

She was a brilliant and precocious child, as is abundantly proved by the accounts of her early reading, her enthusiasms, and her passion for knowledge, and she remained a brilliant and precocious child to the end. The same thing might be said of many a creative worker but with this immense difference: Charlotte Yonge was essentially disciplined.

Mrs. Romanes, in her excellent *Charlotte Mary Yonge: An Appreciation*, says of her that at the age of seventy she still lived by the rules that had been made for her at seventeen. Nothing could be truer, unless for “seventeen” the writer had put “seven.”

The material given here makes perfectly clear the dominance that was exercised over the little girl—for six and a half years an only child—by her father, a man of strong personality and considerable arrogance; by her grandmother, who lived with them; and later on by John Keble, gentle, saintly and scholarly, but wielding a far from negligible influence over the pupil who fell, at the age of twelve, beneath the spell of his unquestionable charm.

Like most imaginative people, Charlotte had a natural tendency to hero-worship. She had strong affections and these were all directed into narrow channels: her father and mother, her much-younger brother, and her spiritual director. Even her childish love for her contemporary cousin, Anne Yonge, was to a large extent repressed, and any demonstrations of it were categorically forbidden. (Incidentally, a similar prohibition afflicted Countess Kate in her childhood.)

With so impressionable a mind as Charlotte's, bred up to believe in parental infallibility, the conflict between natural impulses and inculcated principles was probably never resolved at all.

Certainly, in the portrait that we have of her as a woman of thirty-five there is a moving quality that is not at all childish, but is utterly child-like. It is a face of great nobility, candour and simplicity, and it wears still that air of mingled gravity and happy innocence that hardly ever outlasts childhood. It is not the purpose of an Introduction to dwell upon facts and events that are dealt with in the Biography proper. Therein will be found the story of Charlotte's strange and rigorous upbringing, her own account of the childhood that she declared was "an intensely happy one," many of her letters—mostly impersonal, but all characteristic—and the tale of her immense literary activities.

But there are certain questions that may be dealt with by any serious student, not only of Charlotte Yonge's work, but of her public. In its day it was a large one: it is now a very limited one, but it exists, vigorously and independently of fashion, and seems likely to continue to exist.

In the first year of the present war a short article appeared in *The Times* recommending the novels of Charlotte M. Yonge as "escape literature." The author of this article made one or two minor slips in adventuring too rashly amongst the complications of the family-chronicle series, and the present writer was moved to send a letter to *The Times* correcting these and offering information as to the order in which the novels should be read. The result was an avalanche of letters, the number of enquiries eventually totalling between four and five hundred.

It was obvious that to these readers Charlotte Yonge's novels were only incidentally "escape literature." They were habitual and beloved reading.

It may be relevant to add here that the Yonge novels are frequently taken out of the London Library fiction shelves, and that the largest second-hand bookshop in London always places any of her works in the window, on the grounds that they never remain unbought, and are usually sold within twenty-four hours.

It would be easy—almost too easy—to enumerate such merits as the perfect sincerity of the writing, the faithful attention to detail, careful

character-drawing, and accurate descriptions of middle-class Victorian family life. The same virtues could be claimed by many novelists of Charlotte's date and calibre, whose work has nevertheless failed to enthrall a second and a third generation. Her talent is differentiated from theirs, I believe, in one special and peculiar way.

Charlotte was actually a purely romantic writer, in the sense that every story she wrote was the kind of story that every imaginative child tells itself in one form or another throughout the adolescent years.

All such stories represent wish-fulfilment, whether conscious or unconscious. In Charlotte's case, it is quite impossible, after reading her *Life*, to miss the implication that her heart's desire was for companionship of her own age, fun, freedom, and such open expressions of mutual affection as are natural to early youth.

In the ideal world that she created for herself, all these conditions prevailed and all her life afforded her a high degree of compensation for the rigid limitations imposed upon her emotional development in real life.

But Charlotte, as I have said, did not identify herself with her own creations, except in the two cases specified. She only rehearsed to herself an endless saga about family life, just as another type of child invents a saga of heroic adventure at sea, or yet another a saga of blamelessly erotic situations.

Where Charlotte differed from the majority, not only of intelligent children but also of children destined to become successful novelists, was in the unusual degree to which she possessed this gift of imagination, in her facility for the written word, and above all in her ardent conviction that she could, and should, use that imagination and that facility for a high and serious purpose.

The biography enlightens us as to what that purpose was. Charlotte's father was a man whose integrity was founded upon a cast-iron faith, not only in the broad principles of Christianity, but in the direct teaching of the Church of England. He was actually ahead of his time in foreseeing that that Church was due, and over-due, for a great spiritual revival. The revival took place, and was largely embodied in what came to be known, loosely, as the Tractarian Movement. The new enthusiasm, reformation—call it what you will—coincided with Charlotte's most impressionable years, and she could have found no more earnest, or indeed more sincere and lovable, exponent of its tenets than John Keble.

The atmosphere in which she passed her childhood and youth left, as is invariably the case, its mark on her for life. With Charlotte, there was no reaction such as there is with most people. From the time that Keble prepared her for Confirmation at fifteen, to the day she died, nearing her eightieth year, the moving-spring of her life was embodied

in the motto so often quoted in her own novels: *Pro Ecclesia Dei*. She had for her Church all the tender, romantic and poetic feeling that is implicit in the word "crusade," and with that she combined a kind of common-sense valour, a generosity as practical as it was ardent, that far removed her from the merely sentimental type of "pious woman."

Pious she was indeed, but it was a piety that formed her character, directed her energies, and found thoroughly constructive expression. There are two comments that should always be borne in mind in any appraisal of Charlotte Yonge's work, and its one-time wide, and always profound, appeal.

"She made goodness attractive" was said of her in her capacity as a novelist by, I think, Mrs. Romanes.

We have here to remember that Charlotte's predecessors as writers of domestic tales for young people were, notably, Mrs. Sherwood and Miss Edgeworth. Mrs. Sherwood wrote admirable prose, and was highly inventive, but the better her characters behave, the duller and more unreal they become. Who does not prefer the disobedient little Henry, or Emily stealing damson jam from the store-closet, to their holy and censorious parents?

Miss Edgeworth had more native wit and talent, as well as a wider range of experience, than Charlotte, but there again, in her Tales, so rightly qualified as *Moral for the Young*, she rigorously denies all charm and liveliness to the good, whilst unwittingly bestowing it on the bad.

Only Elizabeth Sewell, whose novels have fallen into undeserved oblivion, approached Charlotte's gift for the delineation of character, and she was her contemporary rather than her predecessor. In *Amy Herbert* she made that good little girl reasonably endearing, and not much more of a prig than might be expected of the only child of an invalid mother with a predilection for preaching.

But Miss Sewell possessed neither the forcefulness nor the actual creative ability of either Miss Edgeworth or Mrs. Sherwood. She is here mentioned because Charlotte's early writings were undoubtedly influenced by her stories, and because she, too, in her degree, departed from tradition by endeavouring to "make goodness attractive."

Charlotte, however, did not only endeavour. She succeeded brilliantly.

It is a mistake, and a very common one, to say that the outstanding example of this achievement is Guy Morville, the Heir of Redclyffe. Guy was certainly good, and there is every evidence that he was attractive to the young readers of his date, but compare with him the captious, impetuous, tender-hearted and bad-tempered cripple, Charles Edmond-

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stone, in the same book. Charles is good, but he is bad too. It follows that he is much more of a real person, and a lovable one, than is Guy. Guy is not *unreal*—no character in the book is that—but he is idealised. He represents the young mediaeval knight of Charlotte's romantic fancy, translated into contemporary flesh-and-blood, rather than the everyday English youth, familiar to her extremely acute powers of observation.

In exactly the same way, Amabel Edmondstone, Guy's love, is most convincing, and most lovable, at her least saintly. Fundamentally she is always good, but her goodness is “made attractive” because, within the literary conventions of her time, she is merry and sometimes silly.

The second significant comment to be remembered in connection with Charlotte Yonge's success as a novelist was made, in all humility and late in life, by herself.

“I have always viewed myself as a sort of instrument for popularising Church Views.”

With that conviction in her mind, she added to her undoubted gift for descriptive and intelligent story-telling the far more important one of a passionate sincerity, an absolute belief in the supreme and fundamental importance of the principles she advocated and (the most effective form of advocacy) exemplified in the creatures of her imagination.

It does not lie within the province of this Introduction to dwell upon individual works by Charlotte Yonge. They have been well dealt with by Mrs. Battiscombe, and it has also been made clear by her that Charlotte's literary work ranged far afield and was by no means confined to fiction. Some of the very few interesting pages of Miss Christabel Coleridge's superlatively dull *Life of Charlotte Mary Yonge* are devoted to a list of her writings, with the dates of publication. This list gives some idea, though not a complete one, of her achievements.

It also serves another purpose.

There exists a light-hearted conviction amongst many present-day readers and admirers that they possess all Miss Yonge's books, or, as the claim is usually worded: “I have everything she ever wrote.”

I am prepared to state categorically that this is a sheer impossibility. To find even the Macmillan Uniform Edition in its entirety is unusual. (It includes, for instance, *The Pilgrimage of the Ben Beriah*, *An Old Woman's Outlook* and *More Byewords*, to quote only three little-known titles.) Such juvenilia as *Abbeychurch*, *The Mystery of the Cavern*, *Kenneth*, and *The Castle-Builders* are rarities, and it could only be a phenomenally fortunate collector who owned the tiny leaflet published by Wells Gardner & Co. and entitled “*Reasons Why I am a Catholic and Not a Roman Catholic*,” or *The Girl's Little Book*, a small manual of advice and

selected prayers. There are also to be reckoned with a number of stories published by Messrs. Mozley, others by the National Society, and such important works, long since out of print, as the *Life of Bishop Patteson*, *A History of Christian Names*, *Womankind*, and *Pioneers and Founders*, lives of missionary heroes.

As Mrs. Battiscombe relates, Charlotte edited for many years a periodical for girls entitled *The Monthly Packet*, and scattered all through these volumes are writings of her own. They include an unabridged version of *The Young Stepmother* that never appeared in book form in its original length, and a real collector's gem: *A Link Between the Castle-Builders and The Pillars of the House*, in which are explained allusions that link up the characters of a very early novel with those of a much later and better-known one.

At least two privately printed items from the long list of Charlotte Yonge's works are, to all intents and purposes, un procurable, although I have seen the second and taken a typewritten copy of it. This is a pamphlet printed for the benefit of the Eastleigh Church Enlargement Fund in 1901, the last year of the author's life, and is entitled *Last Heartsease Leaves*, being, of course, a kind of postscript to the long, early novel *Heartsease*. The other is Charlotte Yonge's first printed story, and it was designed to raise money in aid of the Church School at Otterbourne. It is called *Le Château de Melville*, and the writer of it was fifteen years old when it came out, in 1838. So far as I know, only two copies are now in existence.

The temptation is great to enumerate the Stories from Greek, English, Roman or French History, the Conversations on the Catechism, the Translations, and the many Editorials, that are so seldom taken into account by those who believe themselves to have covered the immense field confronting the collector of Charlotte Yonge's written work.

Readers of Mrs. Battiscombe's book will realise why such a temptation has to be resisted. Art is long and Time is fleeting, and paper, at this date, is rationed.

It shows enterprise and a real appreciation of Charlotte Yonge's importance as a writer, to have achieved the Biography that Mrs. Battiscombe has written here. The impossibility of obtaining material, alone, must have daunted any but a determined admirer. If the record of Charlotte's work is formidable, that of her life is simple and uneventful in the extreme. In whatever mould Nature originally cast her, Charlotte Yonge grew up an essentially reserved person, and she would not have wished it to be otherwise.

PROLOGUE

TIMES WERE CHANGING. Superficially all was quiet during this year of grace 1823. Eight years previously the battle of Waterloo had marked the end of the heroic age. Wellington had a long life still before him, but the other great characters of those days of battle and revolution were already legendary figures. The Bourbons were back in France, and on the English throne sat George IV, quintessence of Hanoverianism, while an apparently immovable Tory Government ruled the country. The bitter memory of Peterloo and the repressive Six Acts were warnings strong enough to silence even the mildest protest from those who were beginning to be called "the working classes." To the casual observer time might well seem to turn backwards towards the solid and spacious years of the mid-eighteenth century.

Yet underneath this deceptive appearance of reaction ideas and institutions were everywhere in a ferment. And in the North a cloud had appeared, no bigger than a man's hand, presaging the greatest of all changes in social history. One George Stephenson was busy building a railway line. Stage-coaches continued to travel the roads of England for many years to come, but a new age was to open when a toy engine dragging half a dozen trucks puffed its way from Stockton to Darlington.

In things of the intellect the seeds of change were already sown. By 1823 Shelley was dead, Byron had but a few months to live, and Wordsworth had settled down to a pedestrian middle-age. Scott, Coleridge and Lamb were all old men, their best work written long before. No new figures had yet arisen to equal these giants; Tennyson and Browning, Dickens and Thackeray, were but schoolboys, George Eliot and the Brontë sisters still in the nursery. The stream of literary inspiration checked itself and flowed more slowly before bursting into the new channels of the coming age.

So too in religious matters the eighteen-twenties were years of stagnation. The evangelical movement had spent its force and the leaders of official religion seemed solely concerned with the preservation of their temporalities in the face of the justified outcry raised by would-be reformers. Spiritually the Church of England was sound asleep. But in an Oxford common-room two young men, newly elected Fellows of Oriel, were making acquaintance with a College Tutor some ten years their senior who was about to retire to a Gloucestershire curacy. On his

return to University life the intimacy thus begun was to ripen into a friendship famous in the history of the Church of England, for the names of the three men were Pusey, Newman and Keble.

Religion was to be the centre and pivot of the new age. "No one will ever understand Victorian England who does not appreciate that among highly civilised, in contradistinction to more primitive, countries it was one of the most religious the world has ever known." (R. C. K. Ensor, *England, 1870-1914*.) Religion is none the less genuine because it lacks any element of mysticism, and a certain type of piety finds its best expression in family prayers round the breakfast-table rather than in the ordered ceremonial of a Church service or the secret outpourings of the individual soul.

For the Victorians family prayers were the most natural form of devotion because the family was the most important unit in the structure of Victorian society. This cult of the family had an obvious influence on morals, a less obvious but equally important one on literature. The literary form typical of the age was the novel, and since reading aloud in the family circle was the fashion of the day, novels were written to appeal to the taste of the fourteen- and the forty-year-old alike. Eschewing both the subtleties and the indecencies of life, the Victorian novel remains unequalled for good, straightforward narrative.

The author who was to give the best picture of this family life was born during the uneventful summer of 1823. This spinster daughter of a small squire represents in herself the characteristic virtues and shortcomings of her generation. She was a highly educated and intelligent woman who failed to recognise the value of anything lying outside the small orbit in which herself revolved, "true to the kindred points of Heaven and Home." The greater novelists of the day, Emily Brontë, Dickens, Thackeray, even George Eliot, transcending the limitations of their setting, belong to all time, not to their own times alone, but Charlotte Yonge is essentially Victorian.

Her life was nearly contemporaneous with that of the great Queen. Like Victoria, Charlotte grew up in an England that was still an agricultural country ruled by a small group of land-owning aristocrats. Society was at once highly cultured in its taste and robustly coarse in its habits; sceptical but politely conforming where religion was concerned, it was not a little lax as to morals. When Charlotte died in March 1901, two months after the death of Queen Victoria, these free-living, free-thinking aristocrats had long ago given place to a race of sober-minded squires and industrialists. These new men were the exact opposite of

their predecessors. Their taste in art was deplorable, their morals at least outwardly beyond reproach, their seriousness remarkable, their energy and achievements almost unequalled in history. By virtue of her very limitations as well as her undoubted talent Charlotte Yonge is the author who best reflects this prodigious social change.

CHAPTER ONE

SOUTH OF DARTMOOR lies a country of steep fields and hanging woods, stretching up from green valleys to the patches of heather and bracken that top the hills, outriders from the vast spaces of the moor along the northern horizon. Less pedestrian than East Devon, less barren than the moor itself, this is a secret country, hiding its surprises. Beyond the baffling folds of hill, behind the impenetrability of bank-like hedges, may lurk unsuspected beauties, a red sandstone church, a shining arm of the sea, an old house warm with the sun of centuries. Just such a house is Puslinch. Built of a red brick harmonious with the red earth of the countryside, it stands four-square, an admirable example of eighteenth-century domestic architecture. Yet Puslinch is not a show-place. Essentially it is a familiar house, the dwelling of a family. And the family who live in it are called Yonge.

This was the background of Charlotte Mary Yonge's imaginings, a large, welcoming house, full of the accumulated treasures and traditions of many generations, a house where children filled nursery and school-room, overflowing to shout through the echoing corridors and play hockey over the stone flags of the great hall. Puslinch was even more to her than her much-loved Otterbourne. The father she idolised looked upon the great Queen Anne house as his family home and loved the Devonshire countryside with intense devotion, counting his own pleasant Hampshire a place of exile for its sake. To understand Charlotte she must be seen against the background of Puslinch and the industrious, intelligent generations of Yonges who for three hundred years made it their family home.

Inherited characteristics played a great part in Charlotte's make-up. In outlook as in temperament she was essentially the child of her parents, and her affection for them was the most important emotional relationship in her life. Piety in the Roman sense of devotion to parents and family was as typical of her character as piety in its more modern meaning. In her filial piety combined with a historian's sense of the past to lay a double emphasis on family history, and if her own character cannot be explained without reference to her forebears neither can the characters which she created in her novels. She found a fruitful source of material in family tradition, and though she justly claimed that, with one exception, no person in her books was deliberately drawn from the life, she unconsciously studied parents and grandparents, aunts, uncles and

cousins, as models for her various characters. Her life was so circumscribed and her circle of acquaintance so limited that as a student of personality she was inevitably driven to concentrate mainly on her own relations. To the lover of Charlotte, therefore, every detail of Yonge family history is of interest as recalling some character or incident in her books, but to the uninitiated it may appear as the very ordinary story of a very ordinary family. The same difficulty arises over the history of her own life, which was almost entirely lacking in external incident. Writing for the outsider it is impossible to know where to begin; writing for the enthusiast it is still more impossible to know where to stop. "The lover of Miss Yonge is born and not made," says Mrs. Romanes in her *Appreciation*, and to those who are thus fortunate at birth the smallest fragment of information is a treasure-trove. They are eager to know everything about their heroine, the games she played as a child, the books she read, the friends she made, even the dishes she preferred for dinner. A life of Charlotte Yonge is of necessity a chronicle of such small beer, and she herself was most successful as a novelist of small beer. *The Daisy Chain*, a story of uneventful family life, is a far better book than its successor, *The Trial*, which centres round the exciting incident of a murder. Today, in the middle of a world-war, even for those who know not Charlotte, the picture of quiet-flowing, peaceful years has its own charm as an escape from the contemplation of the all-too-eventful present. But to appreciate fully the subtle quality of that picture it must be seen against the background of a typically English ancestry and set in the frame of an English village a hundred years ago.

The Yonge family had its roots in two different strata of society. For two hundred years before Charlotte's birth the Yonges had been squires of Puslinch; respected and respectable land-owners, who could lay claim to a peerage or two among their not-too-distant cousins, they certainly ranked as "county." Family pride was one of Charlotte's most marked characteristics. In her novels the noblest heroes are always those of unimpeachable ancestry, though sometimes, like Felix Underwood, hero of *The Pillars of the House*, they have fallen sadly from their high estate. In plain English, Charlotte was a bit of a snob. Yet her natural affinities were perhaps more with the professional classes than with the land-owning squires. The first Yonge to settle in Devonshire left Norfolk some time during the reign of James I, in an attempt, so family legend said, to avoid the expensive honour of knighthood. His son practised in Plymouth as a surgeon, and won fame for his success in the operation of trepanning. He is reputed to have embalmed many famous people, including the King of Portugal and Sir Cloutesley Shovel, and to have

been taken prisoner by the Moors and put to work as a galley-slave. Although they did not emulate these exciting exploits his descendants followed in his professional footsteps, and in Charlotte's day the family tradition was maintained by her Uncle James, who had a successful practice in Plymouth. "A most eager, impulsive man, quick of speech, yet capable of great tenderness," he is noteworthy as the possible original of the best-loved of all Charlotte's creations, Dr. May of *The Daisy Chain*. Although in character he resembles Dr. May his history is more reminiscent of Dr. May's son, "Professor Tom," who sacrificed a promising career to the claims of the family practice. After a brilliant career as a student James Yonge was offered an appointment in London. His father, who had eight other children, lamented the separation "as if he had been going to India." Another opening was offered James in Plymouth, and, torn between natural ambition and filial duty, he wrote two letters of acceptance and posted the first that came to hand without looking at the address. It proved to be the Plymouth one. Thus the family tradition of a Yonge practising in Plymouth was maintained unbroken, and a promising recruit was lost to the higher ranks of the medical profession. The incident is a good instance of that unreasoning submission to exorbitant parental demands which Charlotte was to exalt almost to the rank of a cardinal virtue.

Other Yonges became soldiers or parsons. Charlotte could be very severe with the Army, and especially with the unfortunate Brigade of Guards, against whom she cherished a family feud. She believed that the Guards had unfairly stolen the glory of the last charge at Waterloo, a glory that properly belonged to the 52nd Foot, her father's regiment, commanded by her cousin, Lord Seaton. The revenge taken in her novel *Heartsease* is perhaps the more thorough because she had an unacknowledged suspicion that right was not on her side of the quarrel. The famous legend of "Up, Guards, and at 'em" could not be an entirely baseless fabrication.

The Army might err, but for sailors Charlotte had a very marked partiality, a characteristic that she shares with Jane Austen. Many of the Yonges went into the Navy, and one of her cousins, Charles Duke Yonge, wrote a book of naval biography entitled *Our Great Naval Commanders*.

This same cousin was the author of several other books, most of them either scholastic or historical in subject. Charlotte, although by far the most successful, was by no means the only writer in the family. In the late seventeenth century the original Dr. Yonge of Plymouth wrote several medical treatises and a pamphlet vindicating the authenticity of "Eikon Basilike," a subject which would have appealed greatly to

Charlotte, a devoted admirer of Charles I. Other Yonges were the authors of essays, pamphlets and sermons, all of them typically High Church in character, whilst Charlotte's own grandfather, Duke Yonge, published an anonymous volume of verse.

Charlotte's father, William Yonge, was without doubt the greatest formative influence in her life. Not even Keble had so large a share in the shaping of her opinions and character. William was a son of a cadet branch of the Yonge family. Duke Yonge, his father, held the family living of Cornwood, a few miles from Puslinch, but so close was the link between "the great cousinhood" that the relationship between the two houses was brotherly in its closeness. Like his brothers and cousins, William was first sent to school at Ottery St. Mary. Here he was still within the family circle, for George Coleridge, the headmaster, was connected by marriage with the Yonges. The tie between the two families was always strong, and a bond of relationship thus incongruously links together Samuel Taylor Coleridge and Charlotte Mary Yonge. The Coleridges as a whole bore no resemblance to the eccentric genius who had arisen in their midst, being a pious, intelligent set of squires cut very much to the same pattern as the Yonges themselves.

From Ottery William passed on to Eton. Schooldays, however, were cut short at the age of sixteen, when he went off to fight on the bloody battlefields of the Peninsular War. He was present at the siege of San Sebastian and crossed the Pyrenees with the victorious army. "Four clasps," his daughter proudly writes, "testify to his four battles, Nive, Nivelle, Orthes, Toulouse." After Napoleon's capitulation at Fontainebleau the 52nd were ordered to America, but, fortunately for them, contrary winds prevented their sailing and gave them their chance of glory at Waterloo. Here they may or may not have earned more credit than fame has allowed them; all we know for certain is that the officers' baggage was plundered by ungrateful Belgians, and William lost all his belongings. Suitably enough for a Yonge, he recovered his Bible and prayer-book, but nothing else. The regiment marched straight for Paris, the officers with one razor between them. Halted at St. Cloud, they all got into the horse-pond and passed this precious possession from chin to chin so that, untidy as they were, they could at least enter the capital properly shaved. Charlotte was passionately proud of her father's brief but not inglorious Army career, and in many of her novels, notably in *The Clever Woman of the Family*, she displays her thorough knowledge of the details of Army life.

In Paris William Yonge improved the hour by studying the art treasures accumulated there by Napoleon. He was on guard when the

horses of St. Mark were taken down to be returned to Venice, but the expected protest from the Parisians did not materialise. Beyond this opportunity for study, to which his daughter attributed his lifelong taste for art, William Yonge does not seem to have profited by his stay in Paris. A conscientious and rather solemn sightseer, this dark young man stalked oblivious through the gay cosmopolitan crowd enjoying the delights of summer-time in Paris, barred to them so long by inexorable war. Solemn William certainly was, and probably morose, because his cousin and commanding officer, Sir John Colborne (afterwards Lord Seaton), had failed to implement a promise to show the gaieties of Paris to his young half-sister, Fanny Bargus. The invitation had indeed been sent, but Fanny's mother, always something of a tyrant, would not allow her delicate daughter to make such a journey. To William Yonge the absence of Fanny was a disappointment of the first order. Acquaintance-ship between them was of long standing, for Fanny was all but one of the Puslinch cousinhood. The Bargus-Colborne connection is one of the most complicated in all the complicated Yonge genealogy; sufficient to say that Alethea Bargus was already married to William's cousin, John Yonge, the heir to Puslinch. These two were to be the Aunt and Uncle Yonge so dear and familiar to Charlotte in her childhood. To complicate matters still further, the relationship was already a double one, Sir John Colborne having married Elizabeth, John Yonge's sister. Sir John Colborne was half-brother to Alethea, his mother's daughter by her second marriage to one Thomas Bargus, who in turn married as his second wife the formidable Maria Kingsman and had by her one daughter, Fanny.

Poor Fanny! The phrase comes unbidden at the thought of her. She seems to have been a timid, delicate child, prevented by an alarming inferiority complex from appreciating the fact that Nature had given her an unusually clear and clever brain. She was to hand on both the brain and the timidity to her daughter, Charlotte, in whom both characteristics were abnormally developed by an abnormal system of education. Fanny herself was educated at a school in Bedford Square, where she suffered almost unrelieved misery. "She could not eat, could not play, and, clever as she was, she could not learn and always had 'mediocre' as a mark." The truth was that she lived overshadowed by her brilliant half-sister. In childhood the healthy Alethea was contemptuous of her little sister's nervous alarms and subjected Fanny to much teasing, never realising how much the sensitive child suffered from this process. When the sisters grew older, dark and silent Fanny was eclipsed by the blonde loveliness of Alethea, so pretty that when she visited Winchester College

“men” would loiter round the headmaster’s door in the hopes of seeing her alight from her carriage. Yet, for those who had eyes to see, Fanny had her own charms, more subtle than those of buxom Althea, whom her niece Charlotte describes as having “a figure too sturdy for beauty.” William Yonge was an unusual young man, penetrating enough to appreciate Fanny at her real worth. Charlotte, always painfully discreet over any love-affair in fact as well as in fiction, never tells us when and where the pair fell in love. It cannot have been on that great expedition up the Tamar, a day renowned in Yonge history, when John Yonge first “attached himself” to Alethea, for years afterwards Fanny declared that on this famous expedition the only word she heard from the schoolboy William was “Rats!” However it happened, by 1817 or 1818 the two were engaged in their own eyes, much to the annoyance of both families. Mrs. Bargus would not hear of her daughter marrying into a “marching regiment” (further reason for Charlotte’s loyal scorn of the Guards), whilst the Yonges, with better reason, opposed the idea that William should abandon a profession in which he had made so successful a start.

The trial of constancy which followed this parental opposition compares very aptly with the plight of the two pairs of lovers in *The Heir of Redclyffe*, most successful of all Charlotte’s novels. In her books Charlotte was always addicted to long and trying engagements. Perhaps she drew upon her mother’s memories to help her in picturing her much-tried couples, memories which the years must have overlaid with Victorian notions of propriety, for no pair of flesh-and-blood lovers could behave with the restraint required by Charlotte’s standards. No evidence remains to show whether William and Fanny were such models of self-denying virtue as Amy and Guy in *The Heir of Redclyffe*, but since their probation lasted for five years it is probable that, like Laura and Philip, the other pair of lovers in that novel, they indulged in a heinous “understanding” unknown to their parents. Fact, however, was kinder than fiction, for at last the parents withdrew their opposition, and in October 1822 William and Fanny were united in a marriage that seems to have been almost unclouded in its happiness.

Almost; but not quite. The determined Mrs. Bargus carried her point and William was forced to leave the Army, settling down as a country squire, not in his loved Devon, but on a small estate in Hampshire belonging to his mother-in-law. Otterbourne was from henceforward his home and the home of his children after him. Here his daughter was born and here she died; Otterbourne was the setting which held her whole life, a setting which changed but little during all her seventy-seven years. No sooner was she dead than the motor-car

appeared to destroy the peace that was the especial charm of the place, but today war-time restrictions have restored something of the old quiet. When the bus has deposited its passengers at the White Horse and roared away over the brow of the hill, carrying noise and modernity with it, Otterbourne remains as it was in William Yonge's day. Round the outskirts there may be new villas and bungalows, but here nothing is changed. The village has no centre; it straggles for nearly a mile from the "Otter," as Charlotte christened that nameless tributary of the Itchen, up to the "new" church on the slopes of Cranbury Park. The cottages stand separately in their own gardens which are bright with old-fashioned flowers, pinks, lupins, banksia roses. Men and women lean over the garden gates to watch the few—too few to please Charlotte—who are on their way to Sunday morning service, most of them grandchildren or great-grandchildren of the villagers who greeted the arrival of the new squire, William Yonge.

In the twenties of last century some of the village inhabitants were odd characters. Betsey Comely, "the female blacksmith," still celebrated the feast-day of St. Clement, patron saint of blacksmiths, by exploding small charges of gunpowder on her anvil. The schoolmistress, Mrs. Yates, "sat in her chimney-corner in a black silk Quaker-shaped bonnet, a buff handkerchief over her dark blue gown, and a rod in her hand. She taught nothing and was incapable of improvement." Then there was old George Oxford, the clerk, a pious old man with a mighty voice, who carried a long switch to chastise those who misbehaved themselves in church. The physical peculiarities and ailments of the population were remarkable. One old man ate "vipers" with his breakfast bacon; another applied to William Yonge for a dose of medicine, saying that "his liver was no bigger than a pigeon's egg, but they might give him an imposing draught." A hundred years ago the squire of a small village found himself very much in the position of the modern settler or official in Africa, who is expected to act as doctor to the entire neighbourhood, no matter how complete his ignorance of medicine may be.

Otterbourne House was originally a cottage belonging to an old woman of the attractive name of Science Dear. It was bought by a Mr. Harley, who enlarged and improved the house, and planted the garden with many fine trees on the advice of his friend, William Cobbett, who was a frequent visitor to Otterbourne. Today Science Dear would be hard put to it to recognise her cottage metamorphosed into a large, rambling, cream-coloured house, a place of comfortable dignity and some pretension. Set back from the high road behind a low flint wall that

does not hide it from the gaze of passers-by, the house is very much in the village though not altogether of it. Tall trees grow around, some of them perhaps of Cobbett's planting, and at the back are pleasant gardens and meadow-land. This quiet house was Charlotte's first home. Even today, although it is only four miles from Winchester on the main Southampton road, Otterbourne continues on its own sleepy way. A hundred years ago, when roads were bad and means of communication very few, it must have seemed a dull enough place to a young man fresh from the excitement of the Napoleonic wars. And if outside chances of amusement were few, the possibilities of friction within the home were many. William and Fanny had to share that home with Mrs. Bargus, that alarming mother-in-law, who domineered over her daughter and disapproved so much of her son-in-law's artistic tastes that he was forced to keep all his pictures and books of engravings out of her sight. Yet even her presence was no real handicap to their happiness. Although somewhat overpowering, Mrs. Bargus was a genuinely good woman who had her daughter's happiness very much at heart, and in many ways she was able to make life easier by taking upon herself all the care of the household. The delicate Fanny was thus left free to devote herself entirely to her husband and children. Charlotte never had any patience with girls who declared that they could not get on well at home, perhaps because her own home, whilst containing so many potential elements of discord, succeeded in remaining a peculiarly harmonious place. The attractive sketch at the beginning of her novel *Magnum Bonum*, showing a daughter-in-law, a son, and a mother all living together and all devoted to one another, is a clear picture of life in the Otterbourne household.

Much of the credit for this happy atmosphere is due to William Yonge. No young man, however deeply in love, could forsake a profession in which he was both happy and successful to settle down without regret to a life of idleness on his mother-in-law's estate. Regrets William Yonge certainly had, but never did his wife or his mother-in-law have to suffer his reproaches. Like all his family, William had a strong sense of duty and an equally strong sense of "guidance," which showed him where that duty lay. If Otterbourne was his lot, then the Almighty had placed him in Otterbourne for some purpose. So he went the round of his few acres, busied himself with the welfare of the villagers, and attended to the trifling jobs that lay to hand, and if his heart turned sometimes towards the drums and tramplings of his former conquests he was strong-minded enough to keep his repinings to himself. And soon he had a new interest to compensate him for all he had lost. August 13th, 1823, saw the birth of his daughter, Charlotte Mary Yonge.

CHAPTER TWO

SO MUCH FOR aunts and uncles, parents and grandparents. Now comes the turn of Charlotte herself, and she must tell her own story. The history of her childhood fills a disproportionately large place in any account of Charlotte's life, partly because original material, which is sadly lacking for the later years, is here very plentiful. In 1892 she published in *Mothers in Council*, the magazine of the Mothers' Union, some delightful fragments of autobiography. Unfortunately they stop short when Charlotte reaches her teens, and a brief article dealing with later years lacks the charm and attraction of the earlier chapters.

The seventy-year-old woman dwells with loving detail on the smallest incidents of childhood. To the social historian the autobiography is fascinating for the picture it gives of nursery life in the early years of the nineteenth century, the lesson-books, the strict diet, the Sunday observances, even the toys. But these fragments of autobiography have a more general appeal. Not merely the nineteenth-century child, but the universal child-mind is mirrored here with breath-taking fidelity. In Kenneth Grahame's books, in *Earlham*, in almost every account of childhood, a grown-up looks back across "the great gulf fixed" and writes of what he sees on the other side. But to the day of her death Charlotte never quite succeeded in leaving childhood behind and crossing that gulf. Until well into her thirties her life was a prolonged childhood lived under the despotic if benevolent wing of her parents, and even after they were both dead she remained at home, following the same round of duties and pleasures among people and places she had known from birth. The shape of her life expanded a little, but it never changed. The consequence was that she saw everything, naughtiness and goodness, punishment and reward, from a child-like, even childish point of view. Charlotte the old woman wasted no sentiment over Charlotte the child because they were one and the same person.

Because she never completely grew up herself Charlotte in her books writes always from the point of view of the child and not the parent. Some of her heroes and heroines are, of course, parents, but their relations with their children are incidental to the main theme of the story. In *Hopes and Fears*, a novel written in middle-age, she comes nearest to putting herself in the parental shoes, but even in that book Honor, the heroine, is merely guardian, not mother, to the two children, Owen and Lucy. Writing *Scenes and Characters* at the age of eighteen or twenty,

it was natural for Charlotte to see the story from the point of view of the eighteen-year-old Liliás, and not that of Mr. Mohun, father of the family, but it is curious to find that when she resurfaces the same characters forty years later she writes from the standpoint of the child Dolores rather than from that of Liliás, her own contemporary.

The emphasis that must be laid on Charlotte's childhood may appear unbalanced, but in reality that is not so. To her the early years were the most important ones. Childhood and youth play such a large part in Charlotte's stories that her account of her own childhood must be fascinating to those who love her books. Here are the originals of a thousand incidents; the clay pottery baked at Otterbourne is ancestor to the pots manufactured by Blanche and Aubrey May of *The Daisy Chain* at the bottom of their garden at Stoneborough, the teasing Charlotte endured at the hands of the Antony cousins explains her constant sympathy with small children plagued by thoughtless, unmannerly big ones, and even Duke Yonge's nickname of "Sweet Honey" appears again, though shorn of its mocking significance.

Miss Coleridge printed most of the autobiography in her official *Life*, including a long chapter dealing with Charlotte's forebears. Her text, however, varies slightly from the one which appears in *Mothers in Council*, in all probability because she was using a manuscript copy which she afterwards destroyed. The extracts given here are a combination of Miss Coleridge's version with the *Mothers in Council* articles.

It is typical of Charlotte that her earliest recollections should be concerned with reading-lessons. "I could read to myself at four years old and I perfectly recollect the pleasure of finding I could do so, kneeling by a chair on which was spread a beautiful quarto edition of *Robinson Crusoe*, whose pictures I was looking at whilst Grandmamma read the newspaper aloud to my mother. I perfectly remember the place, in the middle of the shipwreck narrative, where, to my joy, I found myself making out the sense."

William and Fanny Yonge were believers in the Edgeworth system of child-education, "though modified by religion and commonsense." Miss Edgeworth and her father had advocated the importance of play and handwork in the training of children, but their ideas as translated into practice in the Yonge household certainly did not err on the side of softness. "There was nothing to make me think myself important; I was repressed when I was troublesome, made to be obedient or suffer for it, and was allowed few more indulgences in eating or drinking, and no holidays. I have since had reason to know that I was a very pretty and clever child, or at any rate that my mother thought me so, but I

really never knew whether I was not ugly. I know I thought myself so, and I was haunted occasionally by doubts whether I were deficient till I was nearly grown up. My mother said afterwards that I once asked her if I was pretty and she replied that all young creatures were, i.e. the little pigs. It would probably have been wiser to tell me her true opinion, for the question of my beauty was a problem to me all my early life. Once when someone praised my chestnut curls I set everyone laughing by replying indignantly, 'You flatter me,' having my head full of the flattering lady in Miss Edgeworth's *Frank*. Great hazel eyes, and thick, rich, curling hair, cut rather short, were my best points, for my skin was always brown and never had much colour."

It is refreshing to learn that Charlotte's nature, "eager, excitable, and at that time passionate," was not completely subdued by such an upbringing. "I was not too good a child, though naughtiness was never tolerated for a moment. I think it was chiefly noisiness, disobedience, slovenly carelessness, and a certain provoking levity, since I have heard a story (though beyond recollection) of having been put in a corner and there beginning to sing, in a high squeak, 'Begone, dull care!'"

In the eightcen-twenties the fashionable ideas on children's housing and diet were spartan indeed. "My nursery would frighten a modern mother. It was a little passage room, at the back of the house, with a birch tree just before the window, a wooden crib for me, and a turn-up press bed for my nurse; and it also answered the purpose of work-room for the maids. I remember matters unsuitable to 'little pitchers' ears being discussed, and a cousin of mine heard *Pamela* being read aloud after she was in her crib.

"Breakfast and supper were alike dry bread and milk, 'nice crusts,' as the maid used to say in a tone of congratulation. As to eggs, ham, jam, and all the rest, no one dreamt of giving them to children. I remember my indignation when a good-natured housemaid, who thought me cruelly treated, brought up a plateful of slices with the buttered side downwards. With conscious pride and honour I denounced the deceit. I wonder whether the strict obedience edified her or whether she thought me an ungrateful little tell-tale."

It would be a mistake, however, to paint the picture of the child Charlotte in sombre colours. "I say it deliberately, that, except for my occasional longings for a sister, no one had a happier or more joyous childhood than mine." And although the everyday world might be a lonely place for a solitary little girl, Charlotte had a private world of her own where she played by the hour with companions of her own imagining.

"My great world was indoors with my dolls, who were my children and my sisters; out of doors with an imaginary family of ten boys and eleven girls who lived in an arbour. My biggest doll would be scorned nowadays. She was made of apple-wood, with a painted face, black eyes inserted, a wig nailed on, and a pair of leathern arms, much out of proportion. Once she had legs, each made of two bits of wood, but they had disappeared before I can remember them, and her square stump was better to sit upon without them, while her skirts, black net over red silk, concealed all deficiencies. Her name was Miss Eliza, and her history is curious. She was a reward for my first feat in needlework, the hemming of a huge pictured pocket-handkerchief, representing in shades of lilac what we used to call the trial of Queen Caroline, but I fancy it was the attempt to reach Westminster Abbey. It was presented to my contemporary cousin Duke at Puslinch, and after some twenty years I recognised her weeping majesty, not washed out, made into a bag. Miss Eliza headed the line of dolls set up to say their lessons, till my brother was born, when she was condemned as perilous to the baby, whom she almost rivalled in size, and was secluded from public life till a new child was brought to school by a little aunt, and had every Sunday to be taken out of church weeping; whereupon she was told that if she could refrain from tears for three whole Sundays Miss Eliza should be hers! She did abstain from crying, and became the happy possessor of Eliza. She was the eldest of eleven, and many years after—fourteen or fifteen at least—my maternal eye detected the contour of Miss Eliza sans clothes, sans wig, sans paint, sans everything, but hugged tenderly in the arms of the youngest girl, having probably conferred as much happiness as it is in the nature of a doll to do.

"There were some fifteen or sixteen other dolls, some about a foot long with waxen heads, some the old-fashioned Dutch dolls, but the most beloved was Anna, who was well made of white leather with a very pretty *papier mâché* face, a novelty sixty years since, who was laid on my bed to console me in the measles. I used to teach them, make them good or naughty, and treat them as companions after the ordinary fashion of doll-loving children; and if they were left about in the drawing-room the higher powers placed them until next day in a railed-in place formed by the balusters at the turn of the staircase, and called the pillory.

"The two ungratified wishes of those days were for a large wax doll and a china doll's service. There was a lovely blue and white doll's dinner set in a shop-window, the cynosure of my eyes, real china, I think, for it was very expensive. I was told how many poor children could be fed on the price, and knew it must be given up. It was sore,

but I believe the lesson to have been a lifelong one, against expenditure on merely selfish enjoyment.

"My only real trouble was terrors just like what other solitary or imaginative children have—horrors of darkness, fancies of wolves, one most gratuitous alarm recurring every night of being smothered like the Princes in the Tower, or blown up with gunpowder. In the daylight I knew it was nonsense, I would have spoken of it to no one, but the fears at night always came back.

"I knew nothing of ghosts, no one ever mentioned them to me, but the nervous fright could not have been more if I had been nurtured on them. But I am an arrant coward by nature, both physically and morally, and confess myself to have been always one of those who 'die a thousand deaths' in imagination, and suffer all manner of anticipations of evil for self and friends.

"I will just copy here the notes I find in an old agenda of my mother's on my Studies and progress in this period.

"Jan. 7th 1828—Charlotte began *Fabulous Histories* [i.e. Mrs. Trimmer's *Robin, Dicky, Flapsy, and Pecksy*. I loved them, though the book is one of the former generation—pale type, long s's, ct joined together. I have it still.]

"July 5th—Charlotte said, "Mamma, how do the men that write the newspaper know of all the things that occur?" [N.B.—I had a passion for fine words.]

"Aug. 3rd—Ch. began *Sandford and Merton*. [This means for lessons.]

"Dec. 19th—C. began Rollin's *Ancient History*. [It lasted me years, but it was excellent for me; I am very glad I read so real a book.]

"Dec. 28th—Sunday. C. began Trimmer's *Sacred History*.

"March 20th—It is noted that C. has done since the 1st of August 1016 lessons: 537 very well, 442 well, 37 badly. Reading, spelling, poetry, one hour every day; geography, arithmetic, grammar, twice a week; history and catechism, once."

Poor little Charlotte! A century later the tragedy of that unattainable doll's dinner-service is still poignant reading. At the age of five and a half Rollin's *Ancient History* can have been small consolation for the loss of its blue and white splendours. The picture Charlotte draws is unintentionally pathetic; the big-eyed, curly-headed child who suffers agony because she imagines herself to be plain and frightens herself with fears of idiocy whilst working through over a thousand lessons in six months, the idolised only daughter whose parents are so terrified of spoiling her that they bring her up on a repressive system that is to leave

a legacy of self-distrust to hamper her all through life. Yet in spite of the dry "crustesses" and the cramped nursery, in spite of the strict rationing of small pleasures and playthings, Charlotte was right in describing it as a healthy, happy childhood. Beyond all else a child needs a sense of security and the certainty of affection. Year after year life at Otterbourne continued unchanging and apparently unchangeable, a fixed, familiar background to childish growth and activity. And the parents' love was unfailing. Stern they might be, but they were never unjust or unkind. Charlotte knew that her father and mother were devoted to her, and the sense of their warm, encircling love remained with her throughout childhood and youth. There were, too, more tangible joys. Lessons were a real delight, except perhaps for those unfortunate thirty-seven "Done badly" for which the mark must have been "Très mal," the best possible mark being "Très joliment."

And when lessons were over there were toys, all the more prized because there were not too many of them. Some were of a severely instructional nature, puzzles, dissected maps, and history games, all of them much beloved by Charlotte, who treasured their remains and brought them out fifty years later for the benefit of young nephews and nieces. There were also flock paper animals, especial favourites being three dumpy sturdy hippopotamuses, but best of all were the bricks, home-made under William Yonge's direction. With these wonderful bricks anything could be made, from a farmyard to the ruins of Carthage with Marius in the midst of them. Charlotte excelled at games requiring quickness of wit or imagination, but she was a sad duffer at battledore and shuttlecock, or even at bowling a hoop. Her clumsiness was her misfortune rather than her fault. "I think that a great deal of the awkwardness for which I have been blamed, and have suffered all my life, might have been obviated if it had been understood in my childhood that Nature meant me to be left-handed." Poor clumsy Charlotte was constantly in trouble for having "two left hands," a reproach which she remembered and transferred to Ethel May, heroine of *The Daisy Chain*, whose two left hands were proverbial in her family.

On fine days there was plenty of occupation out of doors with cats and dogs for companions. There were hens to be fed, acorns to be gleaned, apples to be picked and popped in at the schoolmistress's window for a surprise gift, and, best of all, an expedition with "Papa" to "speak to" one of the farm men. Charlotte was no gardener and family tradition had it that she once remarked "I shall give up one end of my garden to the weeds and let them be content with that." "Alas, an allegory all too true of the way in which some lives are managed," is the typical

commentary made by the elderly Miss Yonge on this outburst by the child Charlotte. Other outdoor occupations were the weaving of plantain and rush baskets, make-believe doctor's shops with chalk for magnesium and brick dust for rhubarb, and the manufacture of clay balls and crockery, dried in the pocket and afterwards baked.

Even out of doors stern parental discipline followed little Charlotte. "I have paced alone, on days unfit for grubbing, on the gravel path around our field dreaming and castle-building, and it has the advantage of knowing how to be alone and how to be trusted, for to touch the fruit in the kitchen-garden would have seemed to me an offence not to be dreamt of, even when I licked up the beads of wet on the cabbage leaves." But on the whole the days spent in the garden of Otterbourne House were free and happy ones; "surely it is these home free delights that render childhood happy and lay up precious treasures of remembrance as well as habits of observation and homely knowledge."

Dearest of all home delights were books. Scott was always to be one of Charlotte's especial favourites. She came to him young enough, for she remembered hearing portions of *Anne of Geierstein* read aloud before she was six years old. Her real introduction to the Waverley Novels was four years later and came about in an interesting manner.

"We had been starting on a journey, to be made partly in an open carriage with our own horses, but perhaps old Jack objected to a load heavier than usual, for in the middle of a ford about half a mile from the house, he deliberately laid himself down. The water did not reach to our feet in this 'strange adventure of a phaeton' and my father carried us to the footbridge. Some men came rushing down, startling the horse before he was unharnessed, so that he started up and broke the shaft. We walked home and post-horses were sent for for the chariot. I suppose I was excited and agitated, as a child of ten might easily be, for I was made to lie down and *The Talisman* was put into my hands, and made me forget the restless expectation of a fresh start."

Shakespeare, like Scott, Charlotte first heard read aloud by her father when she was a very small child. Later on favourite plays would be read aloud as a special treat—*The Tempest*, for instance, or *Henry IV*, an odd choice for a little girl. When William and Fanny Yonge dined out she was allowed to entertain her grandmother by reading aloud *Lamb's Tales*, a pleasure which Charlotte probably enjoyed more than Mrs. Bargus. Fanny Yonge liked to recall how she herself had read her Shakespeare as a child, curled up in a haystack, and when her daughter reached the age of twelve she turned her loose upon the plays, though only in Bowdler's version.

Shakespeare and Scott sound very mature, but we have Charlotte's word for it that she had "a great taste for mere nonsense and frivolity." Most famous of her nonsense books was *Miss Jane Bond*. "A mono-syllabic book, which began with 'Miss Jane Bond had a new doll; her good aunt gave it to her,' was once found in my hands when I ought to have been much too old for it, and thenceforth it was a family joke to call all silly, puerile tales 'Miss Jane Bond.'" Fairy tales were not forbidden, but they were classed as Jane Bonds. Charlotte, however, delighted in them, and especially in Grimm. Other favourites were Maria Edgeworth's books for children, and *The Fairchild Family*, whilst on Sundays there were *Henry and his Bearer*, *Lucy and her Dhaye*, and various pious tales whose Calvinistic theology caused the grown-up Charlotte to look back on them with pained disapproval.

Books and toys were pleasant enough, but companionship was what Charlotte really craved. There was only one family of children near enough for visiting, and those she despised because they were unable to play at make-believe games. So, in *Magnum Bonum*, little Babie complains that her cousins do not know how to play with their dolls; "They aren't people, but only dolls, and Essie and Ellie can't do anything with them but just dress them and take them out walking. And so the poor dolls have no advantages and are quite stupid for lack of education." Companionship in plenty she found among innumerable cousins at Puslinch, and the yearly visit to Devonshire was the great joy of her life. "I was happy at home but it was with calm, solitary happiness; there no one but myself was a native of the land of childhood. The dear home people gave me all they could, but they could not be children themselves, and oh, the bliss of that cousinland to me!"

Enormous families were to be characteristic of Charlotte's stories; eleven Mays in *The Daisy Chain*, six Brownlows in *Magnum Bonum*, not to mention innumerable Brownlow cousins, thirteen Underwoods in *The Pillars of the House*, and Merrifields and Mohuns galore in a saga which stretches from novel to novel. At Puslinch there were nine Yonges to delight the heart of solitary Charlotte.

"We used to go every autumn, all but grandmamma, in the chariot with post-horses, sleeping either one or two nights on the road. The chariot was yellow, sulphur yellow, lined with dark blue, with yellow blinds and horrid blue and yellow lace. I was always giddy, often sick, in a close carriage, and the very sight of the blue and yellow lace made me worse, but it was willingly endured for the joys beyond. And there were delights. Papa read me the *Perambulations of a Mouse* on one of those journeys. Then there was a game in which each counted the

animals at the windows on each side, and the first to reach an hundred was the winner, or the game was gained by the sight of a cat looking out of the window. In the swordcase we carried our provision of hard eggs, biscuits, and, as it was called from a mistake of mine, 'spotted meat.' We used to eat this in the middle of the day, and have a mutton-chop tea generally at Honiton. Then what interest there was in rattling up to an inn-door, and having our tired horses led off, while we watched for the next pair ridden by a spruce postboy, either in a blue or a yellow jacket, white hat, corduroys, and top boots.

"At last we turned down Sheepstor hill, and, while dragging down the steepest part, over the low wall came the square house in sight if we came by day, or if late, the lights glancing in the windows. Mamma used to tell of my shriek of ecstasy at the sight, and even now, at the very thought my heart swells as if it *must* bound at the sight, although so many of those who made it glad have passed away.

‘I feel the gales that from thee blow
A momentary bliss bestow.’

"There, when the tall front door had once opened, was all I longed for at home—the cousins who have been all my life more than cousins, almost brothers and sisters to me.

"I have said nothing of Uncle and Aunt Yonge (as I was taught to call them). They had devoted themselves to their parish and their children. Uncle Yonge refused all the squire side of life, and lived as a hard-working clergyman, far in advance of his neighbours' notions of duty. Aunt Yonge was of homely tastes, and almost ascetic nature as to gaiety or ornament. But how happy a home it was; how thoroughly good principles and deep religious feeling were infused; how bright it was. Some of the other cousins used to call Uncle Yonge 'the father of fun,' and no one enjoyed seeing innocent happiness more."

It is odd to remember that this homely and ascetic Aunt Yonge was the beautiful Alethea whose appearance had fluttered the hearts of an earlier generation of Wykehamists. She was now the mother of nine children, the two eldest being Alethea, "who seemed to me at an awful distance," and James, special patron of Charlotte. They called each other Jemmy Jummy and Charlotte Shummy and were often together in scrapes which varied from the breaking of a window to the sacrilegious crime of preaching a sermon dressed up in Uncle Yonge's bands. Mary came next, and after her the four who were specially near and dear to Charlotte; Jane, Johnnie, the bad boy of the family, "audacious, mischievous, and unmanageable," Duke, and Anne, most beloved of all.

The babies, Edmund and Frances, were too young to count as playfellows. Of early visits to Puslinch, Charlotte chiefly remembered childish games of shops and houses, and evenings when the children knelt together at the great windows, pretending to gather the moonlight to their bosoms.

After Puslinch came Plymouth and visits to Uncle James's house in the Crescent, where there were three more cousins almost as delightful as the Puslinch band. "Grandmamma with a stick," who lived on Mount Pleasant, was so lame that she would go out in a sedan chair, and Charlotte remembered being taken to evening service in that antiquated conveyance. Then came the crossing to Antony in Cornwall, a brief but exciting voyage in an open boat, with ships to watch, and once the excitement of rowing right under the bows of the great *San Josef*, a Trafalgar prize. But Antony, unlike Puslinch and Plymouth, was penance rather than pleasure.

"The cousins were all much older and teasing was the family fashion. Alethea, then called 'Missy,' a very handsome, dark high-spirited creature, appropriated me as a plaything, domineered over me, and dragged me about until I felt like the ploughman whom the giant's daughter stole for her toy. It must have been great discomfort, for I remember some time after we had been at home mamma explaining forgiveness as what I ought to feel as to Missy's teasing of me.

"There were dark cupboards too, and a mysterious door where something was supposed to live. My cousin Arthur told me cracks in the ceiling were signs the house was coming down, and having deluded me into mentioning William IV as King Bill he declared that I had committed high treason and that he was going to write to have a guillotine sent down in a letter and behead me on Tremanton Hill. I believed him, and it poisoned all the rest of that visit. In the distance was seen a tower called Tremanton Castle, where, wedged into some narrow place, the skeleton of a cat had been found with the skeleton of a mouse in her mouth. Somehow my flesh crept at Antony and I was in terror both of body and mind.

"Still there were charms. The nursery was papered from ceiling to floor with pictures cut out of nursery books. The nurse, Jane Blacker, had some purple and gold plates which we thought the *ne plus ultra* of beauty, and above all there was Whitsand Bay, about a mile and a half off. It was then a really solitary bit of waste, a cliff descending from a field. There was a rough path leading to an exquisite beach of white sand, over which curled and dashed waves from the Atlantic, bringing in razor shells, tellinas of a delicate pink, cockles, and mactras. It was the

most delicious place that I ever knew, and to this hour a windy night will make me dream of the roll and dash of its waves and the delight of those sands.

“Then Uncle and Aunt Duke were very kind, merry, engaging people, who loved to promote happiness, and lived such an easy-going, scrambling life that they were said to be found dining at any hour from eleven to eight o’clock.

“Antony was our farthest point, thence we worked back to Puslinch, the happiest place of all, and the most free from all teasing and quarrelling. Such teasing as there was was very mild. It consisted in exasperating me by calling Otterbourne Hoberton, which I received as an insult, and in terrifying me by rattling the shot belts in the study. Also in tormenting Duke by calling him ‘Sweet Honey,’ because he particularly disliked it.”

There, in “the happiest place of all,” little Charlotte passed rapturous days “in all the bliss of games, pursuits and habits recurring year by year,” until the sad morning dawned when it was at last time to set off for Hampshire and home.

CHAPTER THREE

OTTERBOURNE WAS NOT so lonely a place after the birth of a baby brother in January 1830. He was christened Julian Bargus, in spite of protests from Charlotte, who wished him named Alexander Xenophon. The christening ceremony was the cause of some heart-burning to his conscientious parents. "It may mark the ebb-tide of church customs that Mr. Shuckburgh, our parson, had just found out that christenings ought to be after the Second Lesson, and wanted to begin with him; but Mr. Shuckburgh was so uncertain and queer that there was no certainty that he would ever have done the same again, and it was feared that it would be thought a showing-off of 'the young squire,' as the poor women called him. Both he and I were christened by Mr. Westcombe, who was so afraid of forgetting the sex of the child that he compromised matters by calling both sexes 'it.'"

The arrival of the baby left Fanny Yonge with less time to spare for lessons, and William Yonge now took a hand in his daughter's education. A young man, with time hanging heavily on his hands, he turned all his remarkable energy to this new task. "The regular lesson life soon began again, the chief novelty being that my father undertook to teach me to write, thinking that a free hand would be of great service in drawing." Although Charlotte had learnt to read at an early age, writing had been deferred for fear of cramping her hand. "He made me write, not pot-hooks, but huge S S S in chalk on a slate, without resting finger, wrist or even arm. Between incapacity and carelessness I shed many tears over the process, but I gained much ease from it and even now I feel the benefit in the manner of holding pen and hand, which saves me from cramping and fatigue." In after years Charlotte was to have every reason to be grateful for her father's teaching. She never had a secretary, writing every word of her voluminous stories with her own hand besides dealing with a considerable correspondence. "From that time he began to teach me some part of my studies. He was the most exact of teachers, and required immense attention and accuracy, growing rather hot and loud when he did not meet with it, but rewarding real pains with an approval that was always to me the sweetest of pleasures. Being an innate sloven and full of lazy inaccuracy, I provoked him often and often, and often was sternly spoken to and cried heartily, but I had a Jack-in-the-box temper, was up again in a moment, and always loved and never feared my work with him. So

we rubbed on with increasing comfort in working together, well deserved by his wonderful patience and perseverance."

Miss Coleridge comments that the impression William Yonge's methods produced on onlookers was one of great sternness and severity. Most children would have broken beneath so drastic a system of education, applied so relentlessly. Charlotte, however, was made of sterner stuff. Readers of *The Daisy Chain* must have smiled at Ethel's dismay when forced to abandon the classical studies which she had shared with her brother Norman, but Charlotte herself would have grieved just as bitterly. Her passion for knowledge was immense; mathematics, conchology, Greek, or ancient history—nothing came amiss to her thirsty mind. Writing as an old woman, Charlotte argued that it was kinder to allow a clever child to work or to overwork as much as it pleased rather than to endeavour to hold it back to the pace maintained by slower minds. In this she was right; it was not the hard work but the repressive discipline that was at fault in William Yonge's system. He did not realise that Charlotte's boisterous spirits and noisy outbreaks were the cloak she unconsciously assumed to cover her abnormal shyness, so that severity was an aggravation rather than a cure. Had he allowed her more freedom of opinion and more chances of self-expression she might have grown up less diffident and self-conscious in her dealings with the outside world.

Charlotte, however, was supremely happy in her work with her father, and if William Yonge was a hard taskmaster he was also a discerning one. "My entire life and doings have been a struggle between my conscience trained to accuracy and my inclination to slurring work." A tendency towards inaccuracy and a habit of relying on improvisation rather than on hard work are faults common to all clever children, especially clever girls. That Charlotte grew up into a singularly painstaking author and a very accurate historian is due in great part to her early discipline under her father. And, Charlotte was by nature incorrigibly untidy. This failing she never quite conquered, and even in old age she kept her desk piled high with papers in formidable chaos. But William Yonge was neatness itself and he succeeded in instilling at least a little of his own orderliness into his disorderly daughter.

Fanny Yonge continued to take her share in teaching, and if William made Charlotte work hard and accurately it was Fanny who provided the inspiration of that work. Charlotte seems to have drawn on memories of early lessons with her mother when writing *Magnum Bonum*. Like Carey, the heroine of that novel, Fanny Yonge was a born teacher possessed of the art of making everything interesting. This gift she

passed on to her daughter, and those who were taught by Charlotte, or watched her teaching others, all speak of her remarkable gift in that direction. Her niece, Charlotte Fortescue Yonge, wrote: "She was shy always except when teaching; it was only then that she felt herself mistress of the situation. I have seen her hesitate and blunder with shyness even when giving a simple order to a schoolchild or to one of her servants; but were that girl or that child to be in her class her manner would become totally different, bright and interesting, and taking for granted that the pupil was as keen as the teacher, which was usually the case, as she had that first of all qualities delightful in a teacher, that of inspiring others with her own enthusiasm."

Charlotte's teaching career began early; at seven years old she was already taking a class in the Sunday school, though, on her own admission, not too successfully. However, the hour spent with Amy, Kate, Elisabeth, Clemmy, in their pink frocks and white tippets, was for little Charlotte the high spot of a rather dreary Sunday. For as a child she was not interested in religion. A passion for learning she had from her father, a passion for teaching from her mother, but the third great influence on her life was yet to come. In spring, playing among her beloved daffodils, the little girl would feel an uprush of happiness that she identified with the love of God, and of nights she certainly feared Him. The text "Watch lest He cometh" haunted her; she took it to mean that the Almighty would come when no one was awake, and she would try to keep herself from falling asleep by pulling hairs out of her mattress. But the daily Bible reading, the weekly repetition of the Catechism, were trials to be hurried through as fast as possible.

Even teaching in Sunday school was not unmitigated bliss, for Charlotte, like many small girls, had her favourites and she was quite unscrupulous where they were concerned. "This led to the worst falsehood I know myself to have uttered." She had been brought up in a strict tradition of truth. William Yonge was so severe on this point that his displeasure was not to be forgotten when he detected her in the small deceit of "making a sort of accompaniment to the responses in church instead of following the words." How much worse was a real, downright lie! "A new girl, Lucy Knight, had just come into the class; I admired and favoured her, and took the first opportunity of prompting her so as to get her to the head of the class. My mother, seeing her there, asked me if she was there fairly. 'Yes,' said I. The misery of that lie rankled how long I do not know, but at last, with my finger on a pane of glass in the schoolroom, I remember the confession of the falsehood and the forgiveness." So do Charlotte's readers remember Tom May's

confession in *The Daisy Chain* to a quick-tempered father, whose kindness did not make him any less formidable to erring youth.

Thus the years of childhood slid by, marked only by small events. There was an attack of the measles, rendered memorable by William Yonge's nursing and by a first introduction to *Pilgrim's Progress*. There was the arrival of new neighbours, among them Warden Barter of Winchester, always to be a dear friend. Above all there were new lessons to be learnt. William Yonge undertook to teach her Latin, but handed her over for French and, later, Spanish, to a Monsieur de Normanville, a curious old man with powdered hair, who, if his own account was to be believed, was an émigré of Revolutionary days. The dancing-master came from Southampton, a lugubrious and pious man who maintained that to attend balls was against his conscience, professing great delight when Fanny Yonge declared that she did not want her daughter taught to waltz. Rather naturally, his lessons were hateful to all his pupils, especially to Charlotte, whom Nature had not intended for a dancer.

Meanwhile great things were happening in the outside world and echoes of them penetrated to Otterbourne. In that household public events were always matters of great interest, and being constantly in the company of her elders, Charlotte heard and absorbed much intelligent conversation and comment on contemporary affairs. The Reform Bill cast a gloom over the hereditary Toryism of the Yonges. The first election Charlotte remembered was one in which the successful Tory candidate was their friend and neighbour, Sir William Heathcote, "a slender, youthful-looking man with a face like the description of Claverhouse's." Sir William figured in another of Charlotte's political memories. The Yonges were away in Devon at the time of the great agricultural riots, but when they returned the Heathcote children had an exciting tale to tell of being shut in the strong-room whilst their father parleyed with the rioters.

The Heathcote family thoroughly enjoyed the excitement, but Charlotte saw another and sadder side of the riots. One day she came into the nursery to find her nurse, Mason, sitting by the fire weeping bitterly. In reply to the little girl's wondering questions she said that her dear brothers, John and Robert, were in trouble. The greatest possible trouble, indeed, for they were to be hanged for their share in the riots. Hanged they were not; a petition was presented and they were transported for life, but their sister never recovered from the shock, and the sight of her swollen face and red eyes haunted Charlotte. Did she remember this long-ago tragedy when she wrote in *My Young Alcides*

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of the death-sentence passed on the two rick-burners, their subsequent reprieve and deportation to Australia?

Apart from these excitements there was little to mark the passage of time except occasional visits. On July 14th, 1833, Keble preached his famous Assize Sermon on "National Apostacy," an event which marked the opening of the Oxford Movement. But to little Charlotte, innocent as yet of any interest in churches or movements, the year was memorable for her first sight of London. She gazed wide-eyed at the Zoological Gardens, the Panorama of the Siege of Antwerp, and the bewigged Serjeant in Westminster Hall, but she best remembered Mrs. Harcourt's house, where they stayed on the way to London, a great mansion with innumerable empty rooms, each furnished with a solitary copper kettle. Years later a description of this house, complete with kettles, was to figure in *Magnum Bonum*. In London the Yorges stayed with Dr. Davys, Dean of Chester, whose small daughter gave Charlotte, an enthusiastic collector of shells, two wonderful cowries with black stripes. A week later the kind donor was dead of scarlet fever, but, heedless of infection, Charlotte kept the cowries, and treasured them until she was an old woman.

The next year was marked by an even more exciting visit, this time to Oxford to see the Duke of Wellington installed as Chancellor. Charlotte came down to dessert one evening full of the fact that she had seen the great man walking in Christ Church meadows. Her elders were unkind to be so incredulous, for had he not a nose like the picture of the Duke of Bedford in the history book, surely a sufficient mark of recognition? A few days later she had the honour of shaking hands with the Duke. Little Julian was even more highly favoured by a kiss, a distinction of which he was more ashamed than proud.

Exciting though these excursions might be, the visits to Devonshire were still the joy of joys, although here change and sadness had come to dim the old brightness. Uncle James's pleasant house at Plymouth was now forbidden ground to Charlotte. In the summer of 1830 Edward and Eleanor, the two youngest cousins, had both died on the same day. Only Jemmy was left, and that winter he too died "of an atrophy." Charlotte could not understand why she was forbidden to see her poor dear Aunt Margaret and explain to her how much she too mourned for Jemmy, her especial playmate. Uncle James, however, shook his head; the sight of any child was more than his wife could bear.

Puslinch too had its share of sorrow. An epidemic of measles had run through the house, with serious results to Frances and to Aunt Yonge, who was from henceforward a permanent invalid. And four

years later a worse blow fell. James, "Jemmy Jummy" and Charlotte's special patron among "the big ones," was in Commoners at Winchester. Leave Out days he always spent at Otterbourne, and he was the kind messenger who passed letters and odd little gifts between Charlotte and her especial friend Anne, the elders objecting to the expense of franking this childish correspondence. In 1834 James, being rather unwell, was sent to Otterbourne for rest and change of air. Within a fortnight he was dead. For Charlotte it was a time of unrelieved dreariness. She had loved James as much as anyone, but now she was in disgrace with her parents because she could not cry for him. Jemmy Jummy would not wish her to make herself miserable, yet here were the grown-ups accusing her of lack of feeling because she still enjoyed running round the garden and feeding the poor cats, who must of course have their dinner whatever happened.

In spite of tragedy Puslinch was always a happy house. Not even the severity of Aunt Yonge "in her hideous blue cotton in large shaded checks and a perfectly plain white net cap, with very little ribbon about it," could damp the ardour of Charlotte's spirits. Charlotte was afraid of her aunt, whose reproofs always left a sting behind, but the severity could not have been very great that allowed children to make spiders' webs of pack-thread all over the house, to dance about in any fantastic garb they could lay hands on, and even to skate on the stone floor of the hall in a pair of wooden pattens with tall iron rings. This last escapade called down rebuke from Uncle Yonge himself.

"Charlotte," he said, "how can you be so foolish?"

"But, Uncle Yonge, I *am* a fool," I squeaked out as if he had been paying a great compliment."

The decorous little girl of Otterbourne was here the noisiest of all the riotous gang, "being very excitable, shrill-voiced, and with a great capacity for screaming." The words might stand for a description of her own Kate Caergwent of *Countess Kate*, or for Phyllis Mohun of *Scenes and Characters*. Charlotte had a sympathetic understanding of all tomboys. But underneath all the noise and gaiety were deep and lasting emotions. Between Anne and Charlotte there had grown up one of those passionate friendships of childhood which are generally as brief as they are fervent. This one, however, was to last for life.

Anne was not pretty and her looks were not enhanced by the clothes chosen for her by Aunt Yonge or by a "bowl-dish" fashion of hair-cut, but she was an intelligent, enterprising child, whose natural curiosity was not easily suppressed. Derided for vanity if she looked in the glass, she found compensation by peering at the polished door-handles, and

her eagerness for new sensation was such that she would taste anything, even a poultice. Demonstrative affection was frowned on by the grown-ups. "But I remember a long walk round Kitley Point, with the sea sparkling on one side and the woods sloping up filled with blue-bells. We gathered them in the ecstasy of childhood among flowers, exchanged our finest clustering stems of blue, and felt our hearts go out to one another. At least, I did, so entirely that the Kitley slope—yes, and a white bluebell—still brings to me that dear Anne and that old love." It is characteristic of Charlotte that she is certain only of her own emotion; even as a child she was too reticent to enquire whether her beloved companion shared her feelings.

Other days to be marked with a white stone were a visit to the ravine of the Yealm, "my first glimpse of really beautiful scenery"; the day when Admiral Mudge, a retired hero of Nelson's wars, gave the enraptured Charlotte "a small paper nautilus" to add to her collection of shells; and a whole week of bliss when, the other grown-ups being gone with the "big ones" on an excursion to North Devon, stern Aunt Yonge unbent sufficiently to allow an unending round of picnics and junketing, much to the detriment of nursery discipline. But the best day of all came at the end of the last visit the child Charlotte was to pay to Puslinch.

"I think I look on the finishing era of my childhood as a visit to Devon in 1836. It was a time of rare fun and highly developed games, and they seem to me to have culminated on the 21st of June, Duke's thirteenth birthday. There was an ordinance against our active spirits disturbing the house at an outrageously early hour in the morning, and we sent in a petition the night before that we might rise soon enough to finish our purse, our birthday present, before breakfast. Our ecstasy was unspeakable when Uncle Yonge answered us in verse. Here are a few lines:

'No doubt when the music has ceased in your nose
You will rush to the room where the Graces repose,
Miss Mary, Miss Jane, and Miss Prate-apace Anne,
To make them get up as fast as they can
To put on the tags and the tassels so gay
On the purse you have made by night as by day.
Take heed lest my rest you disturb with your racket,
And force me to rise and to put on my jacket,
Then you'll say, "Oh I wish that my restless young head
Had known wisdom enough to lie longer in bed."

"How very delightful it was! We not only finished our purse, but we walked to Yealmpton and purchased by subscription a hen canary (I can see her now, she was of a very pale complexion). I do not think

we had holidays on birthdays, but in the afternoon we went down Undercliff. The tide was out, and we wanted to catch materials for the feast which was to take place at home. The two maids were intent over one of James Mason's Australian letters"—the ex-convict was now free and flourishing as a settler—"and we were left to our own devices, which resulted in my plunging ankle-deep in the mud, Anne with me, the little ones following. We were hauled out by the boys and the maids made up for their negligence by scolding us." Did the memory of this adventure recur to Charlotte when writing *The Pillars of the House*, where Gertrude May, hunting for sea beasts, falls into a rock pool and has to be hauled to safety by the boys of the party, much to the horror of her elders? Ethel May and Felix Underwood kept their disapproval chiefly for Gertrude's bare ankles, which were judged most unmaidenly in mixed company, even if the maiden were only thirteen. The attitude of the grown-ups at Puslinch was less prudish.

"Our mothers met us, and laughed so much at the maids' wrath that they forgave us on the spot, and we had our feast. One captured wrinkle was bestowed on me, as the visitor, and being extracted with a pin, disgusted me extremely! The evening concluded with 'Dick's Ground,' till Duke, always conscientious, decided that he ought to go in and learn his lessons.

"Thus brilliantly ended childhood's wild delights. We did not go into Devon again *en famille* for five years. Partly I think it was because my grandmother was growing too old to be left, and partly that all that my father could spare of money, and much of his time, was devoted to the new church."

CHAPTER FOUR

CHARLOTTE AS A child is a vivid, brown-ringleted creature, running round the paths of the sedate Otterbourne garden or romping with the cousinhood through the corridors of Puslinch. But with the ending of childhood comes the ending of personal contact. The voice fades, the hand-clasp loosens; Charlotte has grown up and retired behind the wall of reserve which is to hide her from friends and from posterity.

The change is unconsciously illustrated in the one of her novels which has been most unjustly neglected. *Magnum Bonum* is too long, and the ending is dull, but the early chapters have a freshness which Charlotte never equalled except in the fragment of autobiography dealing with her early childhood. In both cases she is describing a state of nature rather than grace, a goodness and gaiety that have nothing to do with religion. The world is young, the woods are full of bluebells, and at night there is singing in the moonlit lanes. Young "Mother Carey" with her widow's cap perpetually awry and her untidy brood scampering round her is a dear and enchanting creature. Then she is converted and her character pales suddenly to a shadow.

So too with Charlotte in real life. Church-building ended "childhood's wild delights," church-building in a less literal sense than the absorption of William Yonge's interest and finances in the new church at Otterbourne. Yet this new-found zeal for religion was to be to her delight itself, only delight so deep that she dared not reveal it to the outside world. Hers was a character that could only grow by retiring into itself. As a child she was gay and forthcoming, but in after-life her shyness was the characteristic that first impressed everyone who came in contact with her. It was a defence which served her well when she became famous, allowing her to keep that spiritual and mental privacy that were for her essential. It was fortunate that she learnt religion from a man wise enough to respect her reticence whilst realising the depth of feeling that lay hidden beneath it.

One evening in 1835 home came William Yonge to his family with the news that the new Vicar of Hursley was to be Mr. John Keble. Charlotte, busy with the twenty pages of Roman history still to be read before she was free to bury herself in *Quentin Durward*, hardly took notice of her father's announcement. What were new vicars to the mind of a twelve-year-old? Dimly she remembered that this Mr. Keble had once been

curate of Hursley when she was a very little girl. Long ago it must have been, for she could not remember his face, only an uncomplimentary family legend that associated his name with a tea-party at which Charlotte had been properly snubbed by the terrifying Dr. Short, a neighbouring parson. Sitting in the twilight this alarming cleric had growled, "Little girls should be seen and not heard. Now I hear a little girl, but I don't see her." Charlotte sighed. Even at the great age of twelve she was still often in trouble for talking too much. However, Dr. Short must have been easily provoked for he had flown out at Mr. Keble too, and all because Mr. Keble was a poet. A poet might be interesting, though she did not expect that Mr. Keble had written anything as wonderful as *Marmion*. Now Sir Walter Scott was a hero of heroes and a real poet. Dutifully Charlotte turned back to Goldsmith's *History of Rome*, buoyed up by the thought of *Quentin Durward* to follow.

Sitting over her needlework Fanny Yonge half smiled, half sighed at the news. Mr. Keble she knew for a great and good man, but was he not a little advanced in his opinions? He would be a great help to William over this church-building plan, but church-building had its disadvantages. Their income was not unending and already they had been obliged to abandon that yearly holiday in Devon that had been so good for William's health. And Charlotte, too, sadly missed seeing her cousins. But William was clearly delighted at Sir William Heathcote's choice of a parson, and if William was pleased she could ask for no more. She hoped, though, that Mr. Keble would not feel it necessary to dismiss their dear, eccentric curate, Mr. Bigg-Wither.

Perhaps the new incumbent stayed at Hursley Park with the Heathcotes while the Parsonage was made ready, and Sir William asked the Yonges to meet him, being the most influential of his future parishioners. Perhaps one cold January day, soon after his induction, Fanny Yonge took Charlotte, well wrapped up in her best pelisse, to pay a duty call at the Vicarage. In anticipation of callers there would be wedding-cake and wine set out on the table, for the Kebles were but newly married. It is typical of Charlotte that she never tells us when and where she first remembered meeting the man who was to be so great an influence in her life.

John Keble was thirty years her senior, famous already for the part he had played in the Oxford Movement and for the authorship of *The Christian Year*. To twentieth-century minds that work is almost unreadable, but read it must be by anyone interested in the Movement. For the man round whom the whole Oxford Movement centred was not the brilliant Newman but the retiring Keble. His poems were its

Bible. There was about him both saintliness and certainty; human-kindness appeared in every line of his strong, ugly face, in the huge, firmly moulded mouth and the wide-apart eyes shining out from under heavy brows. "Shining" is the word most appropriate to him. Newman once wrote: "Keble is a light too subtle and spiritual to be seen unless put on a candlestick." Unfortunately, *The Christian Year*, as far as posterity is concerned, has proved to be no such candlestick as the *Apologia pro Vita Sua* still provides for the flickering light that was Newman. In his own lifetime, however, Keble's radiance outshone all others, and Charlotte herself was to quote a curiously appropriate text as his epitaph: "He was a burning and a shining light, and ye were willing for a season to rejoice in his light."

This, then, was the man who came to Hursley in the New Year of 1835, bringing with him a pretty invalid wife and a delicate sister. To one who had been used to Oxford society at its period of greatest brilliance the resources of a Hampshire village must have seemed very limited. To whom could he talk on anything approaching equal terms? But, fortunately for Keble, Otterbourne was in the parish of Hursley, and to William Yonge intellectual conversation was manna in the wilderness. Moreover, Mr. Keble was an authority on Church architecture—or, at least, more of an authority than William, who only knew that he admired York Minster. Ignorance, however, was no obstacle. William Yonge was determined to build a new church for Otterbourne, and no voice was raised in favour of the poor old building with the three arches "of good outline" between nave and chancel, the Early English doorway, and the Royal Arms over the chancel arch, "the unicorn as usual looking abject in spite of his splendid twisted horn, and the opposite lion hanging his tongue out of his mouth like a pug dog." Population had moved away from the old church, and the new one was to be on a more convenient site nearer to the village and farther away from that new-fangled railway, whose noisy trains were such a disturbance to worshippers. So Mr. Keble eagerly examined the plan which William had drawn on the ground with the point of his walking-stick, a plan cruciform like York and but little adapted to the modest needs of Otterbourne. Each day saw comings and goings between Otterbourne House and Hursley, William Yonge bringing pictures, drawings, bits of carving, all to be submitted to the new vicar's approval. The conversation was of tracery and poppy-heads, fonts and chancel rails, and Charlotte, listening intelligently, drank it all in as she drank in any and every piece of knowledge that came her way. With the publication of *The Daisy Chain* these enthusiasms were to live again in the discussions over Cocksmoor Church



BISHOP PATTESON



JOHN KEBLE

From a drawing by John Bacon, Junior.



HARTPURY

From a watercolour by Charlotte Yonge. Circ. 1859.

held by Aunt Flora Arnott, Ethel and Dr. Spencer round the invalid couch of Margaret May.

The finished building was described years later by Miss Wordsworth, first Principal of Lady Margaret Hall, as “a church in that dreadful *early* modern gothic, the churchyard very pretty.” Today’s taste has travelled far from the standpoint of 1872, and, though the charm of Otterbourne Church is antiquarian rather than artistic, modern visitors would disagree with Miss Wordsworth’s sweeping condemnation. The churchyard is indeed “very pretty.” It lies on a slope shadowed by the trees of Cranbury Park. Northwards the hay-meadows are cupped into a hollow beneath hanging woods, and on the south side, separating it from the road, is a great holly-hedge, grown from the berries of the first Christmas decorations. The most conspicuous monument is a stone cross, very massive and ugly, a memorial to John Keble, who is buried at Hursley. At its foot is a grave, sadly untended, high grasses over-topping the recumbent marble cross. Time has almost obliterated the name, “Charlotte Mary Yonge.” Around her are the graves of her family, father, mother, brother, sister-in-law, a nephew but recently dead, and a long-forgotten nephew and niece, who died in infancy.

Charlotte lies as she lived, in the shadow of Otterbourne Church. No one could say that William Yonge built a “very pretty” church, but if the building resembles a barn, at least it is an inoffensive barn. Nothing merits Miss Wordsworth’s epithet of “dreadful” except the bell-turret, and the passage of years has mellowed even that excrescence. Inside the building is unexpectedly spacious, as well it might be if its architect’s mind was full of York Minster. The amateur hand betrays itself only in the roof. Its heavy beams and carved ornaments are of no period, or rather of all periods at once, and the result is anything but happy.

Charlotte’s ghost must haunt those high pews, with their peeling varnish and fleur-de-lis poppy-heads. In this bare and almost severe church Tractarianism still reigns pure and unadulterated; the movement which began at Hursley and Otterbourne had to make long and rapid strides before it could reach the heights of All Saints’, Margaret Street and St. Alban’s, Holborn. The Anglican chants and the hymns by Dr. Neale and F. W. Faber sung today at choral mattins would be dear and familiar to Charlotte, and looking round the church she would find all as she left it, except the incongruous rood-screen erected as her own memorial. A few more tablets fill the blank spaces on the walls, but the names on them are names she knew well, Chamberlayne, Elgee, Mason, even Yonge itself. The years have left untouched the small high altar, so unlike the long low ones which are today’s ecclesiastical fashion, the

dorsal embroidered with the thrice-repeated “Holy,” even the illuminated Ten Commandments adorning the walls of the sanctuary. The altar cross is plain, but altar rails and candelabra are of the most peculiar and terrifying brand of late Victorian brass-work. They must have been added later in Charlotte’s lifetime, when an apse was built to make room for a surpliced choir in the chancel, an innovation never contemplated by William Yonge. The old altar rails at the entrance to the chancel bear witness to William’s good taste in wood-carving. They are of seventeenth-century design and very pleasing. The pulpit was another “find” that William Yonge picked up in Wardour Street, five panels of Flemish or German work of the sixteenth century. Inside as well as out the church may provoke an occasional smile, but taken as a whole it is no mean achievement for a self-taught architect, “who started with merely the power of military drawing, acquired before he was sixteen years old.”

Though the science of ecclesiology was in its infancy and most architects were as ignorant as William Yonge, church-building was a characteristic enthusiasm of the Tractarians. It was the material expression of the central doctrine of the Oxford Movement, the belief in an “ecclesia.” To the frank Erastianism of the eighteenth century these new men opposed the mystical doctrine of the Church, the body of Christ. To them the Church was infinitely more than a convenient form of organised religion; it was the successor of Christ on earth and the recognised depository of grace. This teaching does not appear very revolutionary nowadays when the most ardent Evangelical can sing “The Church’s One Foundation” without feeling his feet set on the slippery slope that leads to Rome, but in 1830 the word “church,” unless used in the significant phrase, “Church and State,” seldom denoted anything more spiritual than bricks and mortar. Christianity had been for so long an individual or a political affair that the notion of a divinely appointed Church with a claim on the obedience of its members was wholly alien to the piety of the day. The centuries-old British nightmare of the Romish Church, the Great Whore of Babylon, completely obscured the vision of the Universal Church, the Bride of Christ.

Charlotte’s parents were, as she herself describes them, “of the old reticent school, reverent and practical.” Tories to the backbone, the Yonges had been for generations good Church of England men. There was nothing of the mystic about any Yonge, and Charlotte had her feet as firmly planted on the ground as the rest of them, yet something in the idea of a living Church set a chord echoing in her heart that was never to be silent again. Perhaps it was the ideal of a disciplined and

ordered force that appealed to her as a soldier's daughter—"Like a mighty army, Moves the Church of God"—or perhaps the next lines of that popular hymn better explain her zeal. Charlotte was always open to the appeal of historical association, and as a Churchwoman she liked to feel that she was treading "Where the Saints have trod." Something fundamental in Charlotte responded also to the decent impersonality of the cult of the Church. Even in her teens she was reticent, treating religion with the well-bred reverence that made it impossible for her to sympathise with the outspoken emotionalism of the Evangelical. She was not one of those who are tempted to break the Third Commandment, understanding almost too well the deep feeling which forbade the Jews even to write the Name of God. Heart-felt as her personal religion undoubtedly became, the expression of personal devotion was completely distasteful to her, yet religion was her chief interest and some expression it must have. Devotion to the ideal of a Church was blessedly impersonal and its expression could embarrass no one. So Charlotte chose as her motto "Pro Ecclesia Dei," and true to that motto she lived and died.

Fresh friendships added to Charlotte's interest in Church matters. The year 1835 brought a new headmaster to Winchester as well as a new parson to Hursley. George Moberly was only thirty-one, a very young headmaster for those days, and had been but a year married to Mary Anne Crokat, a beautiful girl whose Italian upbringing had not shaken her fixed resolve to marry a clergyman of the Church of England.

Mrs. Moberly was a remarkable character. She was as shy and reserved as Charlotte herself, but she hid her shyness under a charming social manner, behaving always like the great lady she was. Everything about her must be perfect; dresses were of the best materials and sewn with silk on both sides, flowers were carefully chosen for their colour and scent (yellow ones she held in abhorrence), and rooms had an indefinable fragrance of lavender and violets. "Her wrath at being subjected to such smells as gas, coal-smoke, or lamp-oil was strong and despairing," and so keen was her sense of smell that no one ventured to strike a match or blow out a candle in any room where she was likely to come. Everyday life must have presented many painful moments to a lady who washed her hands if forced to touch a penny and always cleaned the silver and gold coins before giving them in the Church collection.

Such refinement must have shuddered a little at Charlotte's shrill voice and awkward manners when Mrs. Yonge brought her twelve-year-old daughter with her to call on the new headmaster's wife, then in lodgings in College Street. Charlotte, however, was conquered at

first sight. Formal calls were usually dreary affairs, only to be borne by pretending that she was living in a distant period of history and that the prim circle of ladies was perhaps discussing the possibility of invasion by the Spanish Armada. But this time it was pleasure enough to watch the lovely hostess, her face so like that of an Italian Madonna, with its straight brows under the dark hair, the black lashes shadowing blue-grey eyes, and the long, delicately shaped nose. Baby Alice, aged two months, was brought in to be duly admired, the first of a long line of Moberlys whom Charlotte was to watch through each stage of babyhood and childhood.

A close and lasting friendship sprang up at once between the two families. Life at Winchester was not easy for the new headmaster; he was suspected of Romish tendencies and both the Bishop of the diocese and the Fellows of the College did their best to throw difficulties in his way. He turned for support to the Yonges and the Kebles, whose views at this period coincided with his own, although later, as "an inconsistent Liberal," he was often a disappointment to the staunch Tories of Otterbourne and Hursley. And Mrs. Moberly, in spite of the exquisite precision with which she ordered her life, had a horror of self-indulgence and a deep, almost severe religious feeling which made a bond in common between her and the Yonges. Her daughter writes: "Anything in religious people which bordered on mere enthusiasm, without corresponding effort and deepening reverence, was distrusted and discouraged by her, but the high spirituality of Kebles and Yonges, which allowed of no self-indulgence or sentimentality, but called upon all their powers of culture, spiritual insight, and balanced common sense, suited her entirely."

With Kebles and Moberlys as the dearest friends of the family, and church-building the absorbing interest of the hour, the atmosphere at Otterbourne House was electric with religious enthusiasm. When Charlotte was fifteen the question of her Confirmation arose. By rights she should have been prepared by Mr. Bigg-Wither, the curate in charge of Otterbourne, a good man but with a character as singular as his name, "of a strange, quaint ability, coupled with great narrowness of views and great energy in carrying out his purpose." Stiff indeed must have been his orthodoxy if even Charlotte could complain that it was too narrow. But the Reverend William Henry Walter Bigg-Wither—"Why, Sir, do you thus proclaim the folly of your godfathers and godmothers?" had been the pertinent exclamation of a Winchester master—was not to be Charlotte's spiritual guide. John Keble himself undertook her instruction "as a sort of outlying sheep." July 30th, 1838,

saw the dedication of the new church, and the next week Charlotte walked over to Hursley for her first instruction from Mr. Keble.

Again and again at the most important crises of Charlotte's life we are brought up against the blank wall of her reserve. Many years later, in the introduction to *Musings over the Christian Year*, she wrote a brief and impersonal account of her preparation for Confirmation, but it does not help us to visualise those hours spent at Hursley Parsonage whilst Keble instructed his unusually receptive pupil in the faith and practice of the Church. Charlotte and John Keble sat together in his favourite corner, with the willow-pattern china ranged over the chimney-piece, the aspidistra in the fireplace, the coloured glass fire-screen standing under the window, open to the summer warmth, and the hanging basket of ferns swaying to the gentle draught. With prayer-book open before him, and Palmer's *Origines Liturgicae* ready for reference on the bamboo table at his side, Keble went through the Church of England Liturgy, comparing it with other and older rites, a method of instruction exactly calculated to appeal to Charlotte's historical sense. Tractarian teaching never fell on more fruitful soil. The fifteen-year-old was at the age when *The Ode to a Nightingale* is a door to unimagined felicities, and the world is a new place because a schoolmistress smiles. So Charlotte fell headlong in love with religion.

But Keble was discerning enough to see that beneath the romanticism natural to the teens there was in Charlotte a profoundly solid core of common sense and an intelligence quite out of the ordinary. Although the girl might be carried away by exciting visions the woman that she was to grow into must have her religion based firmly in her head rather than her heart. John Keble's own religion was a solid and severe creed, alien to the spirit of many modern Anglo-Catholics who claim to be the heirs of the Oxford Movement. So much has been written about "the gentle saint of the Oxford Movement" that it is as well to remember that in reality gentleness was a mark neither of the Movement nor of Keble himself. A great enthusiast for the Tractarians, staying once at Hursley, spent many days searching for a parishioner old enough to remember John Keble. When at last such an ancient was produced and questioned eagerly about his recollections of the great man the only reply forthcoming was, "Well, Mr. Keble, he was a very *stern* gentleman."

Sternness was a mark of the two warnings Keble gave Charlotte when her instruction was complete and he was about to present her for Confirmation, "the one warning against too much talk and discussion of Church matters, especially doctrines; the other, against the dangers of these things merely for their beauty and poetry—aesthetically, he would

have said, only that he would have thought the word affected." The caution reads oddly. Aestheticism and Charlotte were always to be at opposite poles, and poetry, as she understood it, reached its apotheosis in the works of Sir Walter Scott. Perhaps there never was a religious woman who, with nothing of Martha about her, had at the same time so little kinship with Mary.

Charlotte's Confirmation took place some time in the autumn of 1838. It is easy to laugh at her determined piety when in novel after novel she makes Confirmation—or non-Confirmation, as the case may be—into a crisis of the first order. But to her Confirmation was just such a crisis; in her life it was as important as a marriage or engagement may be in the lives of more average young women. Writing as an old woman many years later, she says: "When my thirtieth year came round, the double of my age at Confirmation, my mother said she would like to make some note of how very little alteration there was since that time." The statement is an astonishing one. During those fifteen years Charlotte had developed from an unknown schoolgirl into a successful authoress. Superficially the alteration was enormous. Yet Fanny Yonge was right; the fundamental change in Charlotte took place when she "got religion." For her religion was to be the one essential, and religion, as she came to understand it, she first learnt sitting at the feet of John Keble. Her Confirmation was the turning-point in her life, and from then to the day of her death she remained the same character.

No outward change marked this interior crisis. After Confirmation, as before, Charlotte's life followed the same uneventful round. Lessons were still the main occupation of her day. Rising at six, she worked with her father till breakfast-time at arithmetic, mathematics, and Latin. After breakfast there were the animals to be fed—even as a girl the unhandy Charlotte seems to have escaped any other domestic task—then back again to work at French, Spanish, German, Italian, and Greek. It is odd that this most insular of writers should have had so thorough a grounding in foreign languages. The end of the morning was devoted to ladylike accomplishments, in Charlotte's case very few. Music was always a closed book to her, though later she was to regret that she had not been taught at least the rudiments, and her "two left hands" were of no use for fancy-work, but drawing, under the supervision of Fanny Yonge, was a delightful change from Greek verbs and German adjectives. "My mother drew very well in the old style, exact and minute copying of line engravings and also of water-coloured engravings of figures, and this she taught me so that I could draw about as well as she, perhaps less neatly but more boldly. There were no schools of art, no good

masters within reach, or I think I had talent enough in that line to have gone further." Today one picture remains by which to judge whether Charlotte had indeed the makings of an artist. In the porch of the little church at Hartpury, a Gloucestershire hamlet remote even in the twentieth century, there hangs a photograph of a sepia-wash drawing of the pastoral scene outside the church door. The original drawing by Charlotte is believed to be in Australia. Judging from the reproduction, the sketch has the delicate charm typical of good Victorian amateur work, and nothing more.

Charlotte had a catholic taste in art; she could admire Dürer as well as Ary Scheffer. William Yonge had taught her early to appreciate pictures and painting. "My father had a real love and appreciation of art, delighted in fine pictures, and accumulated exquisite books of prints and Dunoyer's engravings. These were my extreme delight as far back as I can remember, and a visit to a gallery or print-shop with him was a memorable pleasure. He took great interest in my drawings, but criticised every defective outline and quizzed failures. I once set to work to copy the likenesses of all the 'true knights' to be collected, some of whom remain to this day in portfolios. Montrose, elaborately copied in pencil from Lodge's *Portraits* but too roughly shaded, was received with 'What? Has he been scraped with a small-toothed comb?'"

The afternoon was devoted to exercise, or what in the Yonge family passed for exercise. "Out of doors" Charlotte always regarded as merely a temptation to dawdling. Though she lived all her life in the country she took no part in country pursuits. She could neither ride nor drive a horse, and even out walking she hated the business of negotiating a plank bridge or a high stile. Gardening also she disliked, though she knew the name and botanical family of every flower. So, unless one of the Wykehamist cousins were at Otterbourne for a Leave Out day, there was nothing for Charlotte but a solitary stroll round the gravel path or a walk down the village on an errand for Grandmamma, a maid always in attendance to make sure there was no gossiping with the villagers, whose tongues might possibly be more coarse than Yonge standards approved.

This strict segregation was disastrous in its results. Charlotte could never be at her ease with working people, a handicap which she felt most acutely in later years. Brought up in the most rigid Tory principles—"it gave me a great moral shock when I first found out that a Radical could be a good person"—and believing implicitly that "God made them high or lowly and ordered their estate," she was entirely without the inherited freedom of manner which, ironically enough, makes the most

hide-bound Tory landlord more popular with his tenants than any middle-class Progressive could hope to be. Her only means of approach were books and schooling. She would be perfectly at her ease reading Shakespeare with a kitchen-maid, but she could not manage even the civility of a "good-day" to the same girl if they were to pass each other an hour later in the village street.

The duty walk once over, Charlotte was free of the world in which she was happiest of all, her private world of hobbies, imagination, and books. There were shells to arrange, dried flowers to catalogue, and, best of all, a new book from the private book-club to which everybody belonged who was too genteel to put up with the dirty volumes issued by the circulating libraries. Lockhart's *Life of Scott* was "absolute delight." Another lifelong favourite came on loan from the kind Kebles. De La Motte Fouqué is hardly to be found today outside the libraries of Anglican convents, but to the Tractarians *Sintram* was hardly less dear than *The Christian Year* itself, and references to this romantically religious fable are scattered through the length and breadth of Charlotte's novels.

Books were put away with the arrival of "late" dinner at half-past five, to be followed by reading aloud, or a mild game of backgammon, with tea at eight o'clock.

The lack of contemporary companionship in this uneventful life threw Charlotte back upon herself and increased her natural shyness. She covered her timidity with a boisterous manner; her laugh, said a boy cousin, was "a diabolical grimace," and excitement of any kind, by making her lose her self-control, added to her habitual clumsiness. Her parents scolded her sharply and punished her for these outbreaks, but the only people who seem to have understood that she needed encouragement rather than rebuke were Mary and Julia Davys, two grown-up girls who came every summer to enjoy the country air of Otterbourne as a change from their Kensington home. Their upbringing had been as strict as Charlotte's, but a little London polish had been applied to rub off rough corners. The young men of the neighbourhood found them entrancing, and so did Charlotte. Reading, sketching, botanising with these new and charming friends, she discovered that in order to be intelligent it is not necessary also to be uncouth.

But in reality neither new friends nor old habits were of vital importance in the history of Charlotte's development. She had given herself whole-heartedly to religion, and from henceforth everything else was to be a side issue. Everything else except the employment of her special talent, and she was just beginning to realise what the nature of that talent might be.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE YEAR 1839 marks another important mile-stone in Charlotte's life. As far as it is possible to discover from undated letters the publication of her first book took place early that spring, some six months or so after her Confirmation. Characteristically enough, the one event is given pride of place in her brief memoirs, the other hardly mentioned.

Nothing could have been more suitable than the manner of publication. What other famous authoress began her career with a story printed in aid of a Church school? "The truth is," she writes to Anne Yonge, "that we were somewhat in despair about the Girls' School. We would have had another bazaar if we had not thought that people would be tired of it, so Mamma and I were one day looking over my French translations, which had all been duly corrected by the old Monsieur. They consisted of the 'Faithful Little Girl,' 'Corylla,' 'Mamma's New Story without an End,' 'A Fairy Tale of Miss Talbot's,' etc., which, using the 'Young Ladies' as a peg to hang them upon, we thought would do very well to publish for the benefit of the School, so the 'Young Ladies' really made a very pretty story, with the nonsense being taken away as much as we could. The papa is a Colonel at first, and then Jules goes into the army, and the story ends with Aunt Selina, Henrietta, Rosalie and Pauline setting off to join them in Paris, just after Waterloo. I hope the story is not very foolish, but I am in hopes that it has a little better *moralité* than the French stories by the French themselves usually have. I hope, Anne, that you do not think me horribly vain and presumptuous, but I am sure that I should be glad to be able to do the slightest thing for the School, and if you find anything very nonsensical, you must remember that it was written by your scatter-brained cousin of fifteen. It is to be called *Le Château de Melville, ou Récréations du Cabinet d'Étude.*"

The Bodleian Library and the library of Girton College possess the only extant copies of this French tale whose *moralité* was so much better than that of the French themselves. Writing many years later, Fanny Yonge says: "If developments interest you, you should begin with Charlotte long before *Abbeychurch* and trace the dawnings not only of herself but of some of the Beechcroft young ladies"—Beechcroft was the home of the Mohun family of *Scenes and Characters*—"in the *Château de Melville*." Written in careful schoolroom French, the story is interspersed with many fairy tales and fables, among them the history of Master Ratton, which is to appear in a later novel as a charade.

One of the most exciting moments in the story is a rescue from the encroaching tide, an episode Charlotte reproduces in several other books. The five sisters, Emily, Henrietta, Rosalie, Pauline and Fanchette, are natural, lively girls, with the possible exception of Henrietta, of whom her aunt declares: "Henriette a le cœur si bien réglé par la Religion qu'elle a presque vaincu ses défauts."

In all probability this French exercise, the first of her works to see the light of print, was not the first story Charlotte had written. From the age of five she had been renowned as a story-teller among the cousinhood at Puslinch and Antony. Nightly she would delight the little girls sharing her bedroom with stories of her dolls or her imaginary people, and solitary at home at Otterbourne, she would beguile her wet-day walks round the garden with day-dreams about enormous families. It would be odd indeed if none of these fancies had found their way on to paper. Charlotte herself was a great hoarder, even preserving scraps of paper games forty years old, but after her death her literary executor, Miss Coleridge, made a lamentable holocaust of all papers and documents. Except for the single copy of *Le Château de Melville*, no trace now remains of any story older than *Abbeychurch*, which was published in 1844.

About this ingenuous story, as about *Scenes and Characters*, best known of Charlotte's early tales, there lingers a curious flavour of Jane Austen. Maybe it is but the period atmosphere. The young Queen had been on the throne barely half a dozen years and the tide of Victorianism does not set full in until the publication of *The Heir of Redclyffe*. In *Chantrey House*, written forty years later but based on memories of her youth, Charlotte was clever enough to recapture the same atmosphere, still faintly reminiscent of the Regency. There are echoes of Jane Austen even about the title of this first serious work, *Abbeychurch, or Self-control and Self-conceit*, and the heroine, Elisabeth, has a little of the astringent wit and quick intelligence of her namesake, Elizabeth Bennet.

Unfortunately it is impossible to discover whether the twenty-year-old Charlotte was anything of a Janeite. Years later Miss Wordsworth, of Lady Margaret Hall, has an enchanting picture of her: "My hostess, as I see her in my mind's eye, lying on the sofa under the San Sisto picture, in the Dolly Varden dress aforesaid, and showing a very pretty pair of feet in white open-work stockings, and I on the other side, capping Miss Austen *con amore*." But the fact that Charlotte could in 1872 correct Miss Wordsworth as to the colour of Fanny Price's eyes does not prove that she was an enthusiast as far back as 1844. A developing taste for Miss Austen is often one of the joys of later life. Essential differences of outlook and temperament between the two authors were

enough to make the influence of Jane upon Charlotte a very temporary one although the superficial likeness was marked. In external setting their lives were identical; home in a quiet Hampshire village, walks through green water-meadows and over chalk uplands, and for change and excitement the decorous bustle of Winchester. Parsons, squires, naval officers, gentlewomen were the models on which they both based their characters. But where Jane was on the look-out for humour, eccentricity and good sense, Charlotte had an eye only for religion and romance. Using precisely the same material and separated in time only by a brief half-century, Charlotte and Jane produced results which are startlingly dissimilar. Between them there is a great gulf fixed, the gulf between the romantic and the classic, between the author with a purpose and the detached artist, the gulf, alas, which lies between talent and genius.

Yet about the young Charlotte, the pretty girl of Richmond's portrait, with her shining hair and sentimental eyes, there is a genuine touch of Jane. The opening sentences of *Scenes and Characters* strike a familiar note. "Eleanor Mohun was the eldest child of a gentleman of old family and good property who had married the sister of his friend and neighbour, the Marquis of Rotherwood. The first years of her life were marked by few events." The voice is the voice of Charlotte but the accent is authentic and unmistakable Jane.

Scenes and Characters, however, was to look forward toward Charlotte's own *Daisy Chain* rather than backwards to the greatness of *Pride and Prejudice*. It is the first of the long series of family chronicles, although its hero family, the Mohuns, never claims a place in the affections equal to that occupied by the Mays and Underwoods of later books. Only little Phyllis Mohun has any real vitality, and it was a happy inspiration that married her, many years later, in *Two Sides of a Shield* to Harry May of *The Daisy Chain*, beloved by many readers as the most attractive member of his attractive family. The other Mohuns are two-dimensional sketches of characters whom Charlotte was afterwards to model in the round. It is fascinating to trace out resemblances. Eleanor is a first study for Wilmet Underwood, Lilius has a certain likeness to Ethel May, and Claude is father to many of the young men in later novels. The story itself is echoed again and again. Its central theme of a motherless family left to the care of an elder daughter reappears in *The Daisy Chain*. The virtuous brother Harry, dead before the tale begins, yet a lasting influence on his brothers and sisters, is resurrected as the equally virtuous, equally defunct Edmund of *The Young Stepmother*, and the accident which Phyllis heroically averts by throwing away the powder-horn

occurs again in *The Clever Woman of the Family*, careless, scientific brother, naughty sister, gunpowder and all. The book is the first example of an unusual and endearing trait in Charlotte's character, her complete honesty with herself. Most authors draw themselves in their characters, but themselves idealised, explained, excused. Charlotte, however, was ruthless; she drew herself in her books not better but worse than the original. Only Ethel May develops as Charlotte would like to develop, and Ethel, we know, took the bit between her teeth and "wrote herself." Rachel Curtis of *The Clever Woman of the Family* and Theodora of *Heartsease* are both self-portraits, or rather, self-warnings; there, but for the grace of God, I go; there, indeed, in some respects have I gone already. In *Scenes and Characters* Lilius is a picture of Charlotte, drawn with a cruel candour that leaves out almost all the attractive features. It is as if Charlotte wished to be for ever reminding herself of her shortcomings; she sets up a likeness of her own skeleton.

Both *Abbeychurch* and *Scenes and Characters* have about them a young, experimental air that is rather engaging. As an author Charlotte has hardly left the schoolroom; she writes long explanatory first chapters rather than plunging straight into the story, and everywhere she allows the machinery to be much too apparent. Yet her gifts are already obvious. A young Oxford don, afterwards to be famous as Dean Church, said to Lady Seaton, "*Abbeychurch* is a very clever book and the young lady will write well in future." "Oh, why?" said the lady, who was disposed to decry her young cousin's talents. "Because every character, however simple, is perfectly distinct and living."

Conversations are the best part of both these early books. Charlotte taught herself the difficult art of making her characters talk naturally and well by recording many actual conversations that took place at Otterbourne, Hursley, Puslinch, or sometimes at Lord Seaton's house in Eaton Square. As Yonges, Coleridges, and Kebles gathered round the hearth or paced the shrubbery walk on fine afternoons, deep in discussing a hundred and one subjects, Southey, Shakespeare, letter-writing, the Spanish Succession, the correct spelling of plurals—were the Newman family to be written down as "Newmen"?—Charlotte was listening hard and bursting with desire to express her own opinion. Express it she did, eagerly, awkwardly, but always with intelligence. Then when goodbyes were over and the visitors gone home, she rushed up to her room and recorded all that had been said. Nothing escaped; Mr. Justice Coleridge's gentle cynicisms, John Yonge's passion for facts, Mary Yonge's kindly comments, even her own impetuous remarks, all were stored in her inexhaustible memory and all went down in her notebook.

Not only the conversations but the whole of Charlotte's writing was studied in the life from her own home circle, the serious-minded, intelligent people who made up her world. It was a small world but a full one, narrow, of course, but in no way shallow. William Yonge was still the dominant character. Charlotte wrote, talked, walked, studied—and study occupied a great part of her day—all under his beneficent wing. For him she translated the whole of *I Promessi Sposi*, for him too she wrote her stories. Charlotte the author was at times too strong for Charlotte the dutiful daughter. Every evening William Yonge required her to read over what she had written during the day so that he might make emendations and criticisms. An innocuous little tale called "Shiverydown" came in for too large a dose of this treatment. One evening Charlotte decided that she could stand no more. "Shiverydown" went into the bottom drawer, not to reappear for several years until, emancipated from paternal criticism, it saw the light under the much less attractive title of *Kenneth, or the Rear-Guard of the Grand Army*.

Such small misunderstandings did not check Charlotte's adoration of her father. He might occasionally be repressive but she would rather be repressed by him than encouraged by another. For her mother she had great tenderness. Morning by morning they two would sit together like a pair of sisters, Charlotte reading aloud whilst Fanny drew or stitched. Charlotte was happy in this relationship of "most entire companionship," but her feeling for her father was of a different order. Partly this was the expression of the belief, natural in her, that man is a superior being. "I have no hesitation," she wrote in her old age, "in declaring my full belief in the inferiority of woman, nor that she brought it on herself." She venerated her father as she could venerate no mere woman, she thrilled to his praise or rebuke, and strangely enough, she understood him through and through. William loved and admired his little dark Fanny, with her shy, pretty manners, her temperamental spirits, her gaiety and playfulness. But for understanding he turned to Charlotte. He responded at once to her intellectual hunger, her common sense, her peculiarly English brand of romanticism that had no nonsense anywhere about it. Father and daughter were made of the same stuff.

Behind the well-loved parents there was still the formidable grandmother. Mrs. Bargus was a power even in her old age. In 1844 she said her say about the unladylike pursuit of authorship and almost succeeded in preventing the publication of *Abbeychurch*. She was finally pacified by the agreement that Charlotte was to give to charity any money that the book might earn, Mrs. Bargus considering that it was extremely low to profit by the fruit of one's own labours. Many years later a friend

asked Charlotte what she would have done had the family decided to forbid publication. The reply was characteristic. "Oh, I *must* have written; but I should not have published—at least not for many years." Fortunately Mrs. Bargus had been dead for seven years before the publication of *The Heir of Redclyffe*, for the stir caused by that book would have outraged her to the very depths of her ladylike soul.

Mr. and Mrs. Keble counted almost as part of the Yonge family. To their criticisms Charlotte submitted all her early stories. Some of Keble's emendations read quaintly—"In the description of the sunset the sun had been called a 'circle' but the poet had made it an 'orb'"—but such comments were made with a gentle kindness that could never offend. Intensely respectable though they were, there was about the Kebles an almost Franciscan gaiety which helped to humanise the solemn Charlotte. Mrs. Keble had an unexpected liking for bright colours, especially in dress, a taste in which her husband shared. "She used to say that if ever she was deluded into anything very brilliant Mr. Keble was sure to remark and admire it." In gay blues or greens she reigned as hostess at the Vicarage, never so joyful as when presiding over the school-feasts which were red-letter days in the Hursley calendar. She would walk up and down the long tables set out on the lawn to see if all her small guests were as happy as they should be on this day of days before retiring to the small dining-room to entertain the select party of grown-ups invited for the occasion. After tea there was cricket in Sir William Heathcote's park, and as twilight fell Mrs. Keble, accompanied by Charlotte, strolled on to the terrace, to watch for the returning children. Then, across the dim lawn from the shadows under the cedar tree and the golden laburnum came the sound of Bishop Ken's evening hymn, sung by shy, uncertain voices. Cheers followed, more hearty than any hymn-singing, and as the tramp of boys' feet died away in the distance Charlotte looked up at the first pale stars showing above the church spire and knew that she was happy.

Hursley was a magnet that drew many who were interested in the Oxford Movement, and there Charlotte was to mix with a society whose members were as intellectual and as religious-minded as herself. One thing was lacking, and that was variety. All the members of Charlotte's circle were cut to the same severe pattern and the ordinary gaieties of youth seemed to have passed her by. Two balls a year were her ration, and even these two were no great pleasure. She was a poor dancer and, one suspects, a poor conversationalist as conversation is understood in the ballroom. "Late hours always tired me beyond enjoyment and I never had enough, except in one London visit to some cousins, to get into the

swing." It would be entrancing to know more of that London visit when at last Charlotte "got into the swing," but the rest is silence.

Instead of balls there was for Charlotte the mild dissipation of dining out, usually at Hursley Park with the Heathcotes, or at Warden Barter's house at Winchester. These dinners were serious and formal occasions, "when the removal of the cloth was a danger to the dresses of the ladies, and must have been the most delicate of operations to the footmen, and when the young ladies sat in terror of being asked to take wine." This last horror was a special nightmare to Charlotte, who attributed her immunity from headaches, in which, to judge from her novels, she must have been unique among Victorian ladies, to the fact that she never touched alcohol "until almost middle-age when a depression in health caused it to be prescribed." But if dining-out involved the danger of being asked to "take wine" it also promised the joys of good conversation. Over the venison and woodcock all things respectable in heaven and earth would be discussed, and Charlotte would listen with all her ears, sternly discouraging advances on the part of any of her contemporaries who might be present. When so much was worth hearing who would wish to waste time in chatter?

When she was about twenty Charlotte added a friend of her own to this select and serious circle. What she needed was a companion of her own age, someone young, gay, irresponsible; what she found was an earnest-minded invalid twenty years her senior. Marianne Dyson was perhaps Charlotte's dearest friend, but the suspicion arises that hers was among the worst influences on her life. Not that there was anything about Miss Dyson of which the most anxious mother could possibly disapprove. Fanny Yonge, indeed, was delighted with the friendship and encouraged it to the best of her power. The most profitable friendships, however, are most likely to be those which provoke parents if not to disapproval at least to slight dismay. Charlotte needed to expand, to see life as it was lived beyond the bounds of the Tractarian party; above all, she needed male society of a different brand to that provided by Mr. Keble or Warden Barter. Marianne Dyson was the complete spinster, living with her mother and a parson brother at Dogmersfield. Inevitably she and Charlotte were drawn together by their community of interests. Marianne, as well as Charlotte, was an author, one of her books, *Ivo and Verena*, enjoying a considerable success. But, like Charlotte, her chief enthusiasm was not for literature but for school-teaching. She had started a boarding-school for the class of children described by Miss Coleridge as "superior village girls," and the supervision of this school was the great interest of her life. Good text-books were scarce,

and soon Charlotte was busy writing simple history books and comments on the Catechism for the benefit of "calfdom." The origin of this somewhat repellent nickname is obscure, though Miss Coleridge has the unlikely explanation that it arose from the fact that the "superior village girls" enjoyed both the milk of English literature and the milk of human kindness.

Human kindness is not the quality that is most easily associated with Marianne Dyson. Charlotte addressed her as "My dear Driver" and signed herself "Your loving Slave." Doubtless Marianne was convinced that it was her duty to keep her young friend up to the mark both over writing and school-teaching, and Charlotte looked up to Marianne with affectionate respect. Years later she sketched the relationship between them as she saw it, though not as it was in fact, when writing *The Clever Woman of the Family*, where the enthusiastic and awkward Rachel is subdued and civilised by her friendship with the much older invalid Ermine. Virtuous though she is, Ermine remains an obstinately unsympathetic character, and dislike of Ermine may explain the instinctive antipathy which admirers of Charlotte must feel for the worthy Miss Dyson.

In 1850 Charlotte published *Henrietta's Wish, or Domineering*. Undeserved oblivion has fallen upon this charming tale, which has long been out of print. Told briefly, the story is indeed somewhat unconvincing. Henrietta and Fred are twin children of Mrs. Langford, whose husband was killed in a riding accident when the twins were only a week old. Sixteen years later the widow's nerves are still so much affected that she will not allow Fred to ride or drive, or even to skate on a pond warranted safe by the most unimpeachable of uncles. Although Mrs. Langford herself had been brought up at Knight Sutton, her husband's home, she has never taken her children there since the accident. Henrietta and Fred are naturally eager to see their relations, and hearing that a suitable house is vacant they persuade their mother to settle near Knight Sutton. Not merely Henrietta and Fred, be it noted, but grandparents, cousins, even the omniscient Uncle Geoffrey, all urge the expediency of this plan, and Mrs. Langford herself is but half unwilling. Meanwhile, whilst the house is being decorated, at Henrietta's wish they all go to spend Christmas with their grandparents. The result is unexpected. Provoked by his naughty but attractive cousin Beatrice, Fred ignores his mother's alarms and insists on driving the staid old "Dumpling." An accident, of course, occurs; Fred suffers from serious concussion, and Mrs. Langford, after nursing him devotedly, dies of heart disease.

Mrs. Langford was in fact a silly woman who deserved to be slapped.

Her nervous headaches and spasms, her ostentatious unselfishness, her unscrupulous play upon the better feelings of her children, would have afforded great sport to modern psychologists, but Charlotte holds up this odious female as the pattern of maternal devotion, to be obeyed in everything, even in the unreasonable prohibitions by which she was endeavouring to make a mother's baby of a high-spirited schoolboy.

Yet, in spite of the peculiarities of the plot, *Henrietta's Wish* is not merely a great improvement on Charlotte's earlier tales, but one of the most attractive of all her stories. She proves here conclusively that Dean Church was right in his judgment; all her characters are "perfectly distinct and living," and by this time she has learnt to make them less simple. Henrietta, a beauty without much power of attraction, is contrasted with plain Beatrice, "Queen Bee," whose influence over her boy cousins leads to the final catastrophe. There is an enchanting scene with the young people busy upon Christmas decorations for the church, and naughty Queen Bee enjoying the opportunity to play Fred off against his cousin Alex. "Not that there was what even a severe judge would call irreverence in word or deed; there was no idle laughter and the conversation was in a tone and a style which showed that they had been all well trained in respect for the sanctity of the place." Nevertheless, Charlotte makes it plain that this was an unsuitable moment for even the mildest of schoolboy flirtations, and our approval is invited for Henrietta, sitting alone at the far end of the church and weaving the sacred monogram in holly whilst she meditates on hymns suitable to her employment. Can it be that Charlotte, pretty Charlotte, had sometimes found herself in the same predicament as Henrietta?

The situation has its absurd side, but the two girls are far from being absurdities. They are attractive school-girlish creatures, the one with her head in the clouds, the other with her feet planted very firmly on the ground. And when adversity comes the flirtatious Queen Bee shows to better advantage than the "nice" Henrietta, which is usually the way with the Queen Bees and Henriettas of real life. Charlotte is nearly always successful with her schoolboy characters. In spite of his mother's efforts Fred is no prig; he is a clever boy with a liking for books combined with a great desire to excel in the outdoor sports which she denies to him. Charlotte convinces us that his love stood the strain of the obedience exacted from him, and that he remained to the end a loving, warm-hearted, and only slightly rebellious son.

The other boys are sketched in less detail; tough, everyday creatures, they serve as contrast to the more intelligent but not less courageous Fred, who is not too sensitive to enjoy a good rat-hunt. Rat-hunting is

neither a picturesque nor an edifying pursuit, yet Charlotte exempts it from her general condemnation of blood-sports. One of her cousins, writing as an old lady, said of Charlotte : "What a tender heart she had ! Not the smallest insect would she hurt, and how cruel she thought you if you killed a wasp, and the same with regard to fishing. I have heard many discussions on that point, on hunting also." But Beatrice and Henrietta watch a rat-hunt with the greatest interest, and though Henrietta moralises a little on "the hunting spirit of mankind," she apparently has no qualms as to the propriety of a young lady looking on at so blood-thirsty a spectacle. And this although Charlotte not merely condemns ladies who hunt, but even those who ride to the meet. The exceptions to her code of conduct and manners are sometimes as surprising as the code itself.

Even the exemplary Uncle Geoffrey attends the rat-hunt. Uncle Geoffrey, who is the pattern of all the virtues, may not be a particularly attractive character, but he is a very real one. He has a certain resemblance to William Yonge, just as the bustling, narrow-minded grandmother is reminiscent of Mrs. Bargus. The old lady's objection to charades awakes memories of *Mansfield Park*, but fifty years had seen a great change in the attitude adopted towards private theatricals. Jane Austen, who is no prude, considers such things wrong and improper in themselves, but the strait-laced Charlotte sympathises with the young people thwarted by old-fashioned prejudice. Her displeasure is not for the charades but for the arch-offence of disrespect towards elders and betters, no matter how unreasonable those elders may be.

The year of the publication of *Henrietta's Wish* saw the appearance of a better-known but not more charming book. School-teaching was a rival interest to authorship, and letters flew backwards and forwards between Charlotte and Marianne Dyson full of the doings of the "dogs" and "otters," as the children of Dogmersfield and Otterbourne were respectively nicknamed. One day the idea came to Charlotte that others besides Marianne might be interested in her school-children. The result was *Langley School*. These attractive little stories first appeared in *The Pink Mag*, or, to give the publication its correct title, *The Magazine for the Young*. Charlotte had started contributing to this periodical very soon after the appearance of its first number in 1842, and by 1850, when *Langley School* was reprinted in book form, she was already in a modest way an established author, with four books to her credit as well as various magazine articles. *Langley School* was, however, the first of her works to reach a public very much larger than her own immediate circle. Intended as a children's book, these simple little tales somehow or other

fired the imagination of girls in their teens and set a whole generation to school-teaching. In style *Langley School*, like *Henrietta's Wish*, is a great advance on earlier books. Although Charlotte is writing for the nursery her touch is quite mature, and it is clear that she has learnt how to write a competent book, no matter how juvenile her readers.

The success of *Langley School* brought Charlotte's name before the reading public and perhaps emboldened her to launch out on a new venture. The first number of *The Monthly Packet* was published in January 1851, and the magazine was to remain under her editorship until 1890. In the 'fifties the duties of an editor were much less onerous than they are today; *The Monthly Packet* had neither office nor staff, and a few days' delay in publication was no great matter to a periodical whose circulation barely touched the giddy figure of fifteen hundred copies. Although the idea had originated with the Dysons *The Monthly Packet* was almost entirely Charlotte's own creation and served as an instrument to spread the influence of her personality among successive generations of girls. It was intended as a Church of England paper for young people, and so respectable was its tone that even its founders nicknamed it "The Codger," declaring that it was certain to please "steady old codgers." Various names were suggested, including "The Maiden's Manual," before its non-committal title was finally adopted.

The Editor stated the aims and opinions of the new magazine in her introduction to the first number: "If the pretty old terms, maidens and damsels, had not gone out of fashion, I should address this letter by that name to the readers for whom this little book is, in the first place, intended; young girls, or maidens, or young ladies, whichever you like to be called, who are above the age of childhood, and who are either looking back on school-days with regret, or else pursuing the most important part of education, namely self-education. It has been said that every one forms their own character between the ages of fifteen and five-and-twenty, and this Magazine is meant to be in some degree a help to those who are thus forming it; not as a guide, since that is the part of deeper and graver books, but as a companion in times of recreation, which may help you to perceive how to bring your religious principles to bear upon your daily life, may show you the examples, both good and evil, of historical persons, and may tell you of the workings of God's providence both here and in other lands."

The wish was abundantly fulfilled, for *The Monthly Packet* helped to mould the character of innumerable young ladies. Many of Charlotte's stories were first published in its pages, among them *The Little Duke*, *The Lances of Lynwood*, *The Daisy Chain*, and *The Trial*, and other works

of a more serious character, including *Musings over the Christian Year*, *Conversations on the Catechism*, and the long series of *Cameos from History*. Victorian maidens waited eagerly for the monthly issue, anxious for the next instalment of the serial by their dear Miss Yonge. *The Daisy Chain* and *The Pillars of the House* were doses of jam delicious enough to disguise any amount of powder in the form of articles on English hymnology, papers on parish work, "and now and then a description of some ceremony in the Greek Church." So *The Monthly Packet* grew and flourished, remaining almost to the end one of the abiding interests and occupations of Charlotte's long life.

By the time the first issue appeared clouds had misted over the clear gaiety of Hursley. All that affected the Kebles touched the Yonges also, so close was the bond between the two families. In 1845 both Mrs. Keble and Tom Keble, brother to John, fell desperately ill, and only recovered after their lives had been despaired of. But a far worse blow than illness, however serious, was to fall that year on John Keble. In 1843, fearful of what was coming, Keble wrote to Newman: "God forgive us and bless us, and choose out our burthen for us, and help us to bear it; and if it be His will may we two never be divided in Communion." His prayer was not to be granted, and in 1845 Newman was received into the Church of Rome. To Keble the loss was worse than death. His letter to Newman, dated October 3rd, 1845, is touching in its deep affection and entire freedom from reproach: "My dear Newman,—You have been a kind and a faithful friend to me, in a way which scarce anyone else could have been, and you are so mixed up with old and dear and sacred thoughts that I cannot well bear to part with you, most unworthy as I know myself to be; and yet I cannot go along with you. I must cling to the belief that we are not really parted; you have taught me so, and I scarce think you can unteach me. And having relieved my mind with this little word, I will only say God bless you, and reward you a thousand-fold for all your help in every way to me unworthy, and to so many others. May you have peace where you have gone, and help us in some way to get peace; but somehow I scarce think it will be in the way of controversy. And so with somewhat of the feeling that the spring has been taken out of the year, I am always your affectionate and grateful—J. Keble."

Yet though the spring had gone Keble must carry on through the dreary days for the sake of the Movement in which he still believed whole-heartedly. A century later we who have seen six countries conquered in six months and the greatness of France annihilated in as many weeks are hard put to it to explain the catastrophic reaction to Newman's

secession. Inevitably the whole business appears a storm in a tea-cup. Yet at the time it was undoubtedly a crisis of the first order. There is an illuminating sentence in Miss Charlotte Fortescue Yonge's brief memoir of her aunt: "What a host of interesting memories that person must have who was growing up at the time Queen Victoria ascended the throne, when the American emancipation of slaves took place, when the 'Peccavi' telegram arrived, when the Oxford Tractarian Movement was beginning, when Dickens' works were coming out in numbers, when railways were still looked upon as dangerous!" Anyone who has lived through the last twenty-five years would scarcely count these famous events worth a front-page headline in the newspaper. But they were not small happenings to those who lived through them, and the repercussions of Newman's secession were felt far beyond the confines of Tractarian society. His defection might well have meant the ruin of the whole Oxford Movement. The leader had gone, the sun had fallen from heaven, white was black and black was white. "We sat calmly at our breakfasts every morning," wrote Dean Church, "and then someone arrived with news of something disagreeable—someone gone, someone sure to go."

Keble stood firm in the general collapse, and whilst Keble held fast the Oxford Movement still lived. Firmness was the easier for him because as a particular friend he had been so well acquainted with the state of Newman's mind that he suffered little surprise when the blow fell. Others less intimate with their leader had not realised for how long he had been wavering in his allegiance. The shattered forces rallied round Keble, and secure in his steadfastness the Movement grew and prospered once more.

Charlotte herself, as became Keble's favoured pupil, remained unswerving in her belief though not untouched by doubts. At the height of the storm Keble guessed at the trouble in her mind, and one evening, when he should have been sitting to Richmond for his portrait, he took Charlotte for a long walk by the river-side, leaving the artist to grumble at the vagaries of such a sitter. As the girl of twenty poured out her curiously acute questions Keble pondered seriously on the right answers to give her. Here was a young and questing mind, which he himself had turned towards Catholic faith and practice, ridding it by his own teaching of the more obvious Protestant calumnies against Rome. He could not conscientiously declare either the one Church to be wholly right or the other wholly wrong. Very patiently, very fairly, he set forth the arguments in favour of loyalty to the Church of England, and then paused before summing up. "No doubt we could ask many questions they could not answer, and they could ask us many which we

could not answer ; we can only each go on in our own way, holding to the truth that we know we have." The unemotional words were enough for Charlotte ; from that day her allegiance never faltered and her last work, published in the year of her death, bore the title, *Reasons why I am a Catholic and not a Roman Catholic*.

So, in spite of cares and bitter disappointment, Hursley kept its quiet spirit. Newman might be gone beyond recall and the Church of England rocked by many storms, but still bee orchis, herb paris and lilies of the valley grew in Parnholt wood, the goal of many a botanising expedition, and books innumerable waited to be read aloud at all hours, convenient and inconvenient. On one of the famous outings in quest of those bee orchis Mrs. Keble read aloud all the entries for the Newdigate Prize Poem, Norman May's "painted bubble." Certainly in the Vicarage carriage there was no nonsense about not speaking to the man at the reins. Keble's powers of horsemanship were never very great ; he was all too frequently "in a stud," as his old gardener described his brown studies, and this habit of reading aloud cannot have improved his concentration. Of an evening, when books were at last laid aside, Mrs. Keble would be at the piano playing Handel interspersed with old Irish airs, or there would be the paper games that were Charlotte's particular delight. On one occasion when the problem set was to write a verse answering the question, "How old are you :" and bringing in the word "Apple-dumpling," the one-time Professor of Poetry produced a masterpiece. Several plodding efforts were read out before it came to the turn of the great man. Pushing his spectacles back on to his forehead and beaming at the assembled company, Keble proceeded to read aloud :

"By the help of bread and butter,
Apple-dumplings, eggs, and beer,
If the truth I needs must utter
I have droned near fifty year."

The scene thus set is ludicrous, enchanting, simple-minded, intellectual, all at once. Charlotte did not have to go far for the background to her stories ; Norman and Ethel of *The Daisy Chain*, Geraldine and Felix of *The Pillars of the House*, would have found themselves at once at home in Hursley Vicarage.

In this congenial atmosphere, guarded by loving parents, guided by her dear Mr. Keble, and watched over by her formidable "Driver" of Dogmersfield, Charlotte grew from girlhood into "Young Ladyhood" —"a prettier expression," she says, "than *Backfischkeit*"—and from the young lady she developed almost imperceptibly into a grown woman

nearing thirty. Then “the Driver” did her friend a good turn for which much can be forgiven her. In May 1850 Charlotte went to stay at Dogmersfield, and in the course of the visit Marianne Dyson showed her the notes of an unsuccessful story. The story itself might be a failure but the central theme was a good one and, for what it was worth, she handed it over to Charlotte. “She told me that there were two characters she wanted to see brought out in a story, namely, the essentially contrite and the self-satisfied. Good men, we agreed, were in most of the books of the day subdued by the memory of some involuntary disaster, generally the killing of someone out shooting, whereas the ‘penitence of the saints’ was unattempted. The self-satisfied hero was to rate the humble one at still lower than his own estimate, to persecute him, and never be undeceived until he had caused his death. This was the germ of the tale, of which mine was the playwright work of devising action and narrative.”

The tale was *The Heir of Redclyffe*.

CHAPTER SIX

WITH NATURAL POLITENESS Charlotte often referred to Sir Guy Morville, hero of *The Heir of Redclyffe*, as "Marianne's son." In reality he was very much her own. No mother ever doted more on her son in the flesh than Charlotte on this brain-child of hers. All the time that she was writing *The Heir of Redclyffe*, Charlotte was obsessed by her characters, and especially by Guy. She was for ever discussing him with her parents, with the Kebles, and, of course, with Marianne Dyson. "I think," she writes, "that you must want to rest from Guy on Whit Sunday at least, and so do I"; but rest from Guy she could not.

To Charlotte her characters had a life of their own apart from her; she felt herself to be recorder rather than creator. Can it be that from her Coleridge relations she had inherited a domesticated and sober variation of Samuel Taylor Coleridge's daemon? "I have found out what the offence was that made Guy bang the door" is a typical remark. She found out, she did not invent. And again, "I have been reading Mr. Hurrell Froude over again; I am sure he is wrong when in that essay in fiction he says the author has no pleasure in it, and feels the events and people are under his own control. I am sure I don't, and what Guy and Philip may choose to turn out I cannot tell, and they seem just like real acquaintances."

These new and absorbing acquaintances kept her busy for the better part of 1850 and 1851. Like all Charlotte's early work, *The Heir of Redclyffe* owed much to home comment and criticism. William Yonge looked through every page and the Kebles were always ready with kindly interest and advice. John Keble read and corrected the finished manuscript; "in general the purport of his marks was to guard to the utmost both delicacy and reverence."

After going the round of the home critics the book was foolishly sent to John Murray, a firm which at that time did not deal in fiction. If Miss Coleridge is correct with her dates *The Heir of Redclyffe* was finished in August 1851, but it was certainly not published till the New Year of 1853. Mr. John Parker was the publisher. Did he realise what treasure-trove had fallen into his hands? The book was to prove one of the most popular novels of the century. It would be interesting to know how much in hard cash author and publisher made out of its success. In all probability Charlotte herself neither knew nor cared; she had that fine disregard of money which characterises those who are born com-

fortably off and remain all their lives in that enviable financial state. In the 'fifties the figures of sales were small compared to those of a modern best-seller; at the height of the book's success Charlotte writes: "A note from Papa tells us Parker has sold 500 out of 750 and talks of an edition of 1000."

The book pleased the novel-reading public because it was the book for which, all unconsciously, that public had been waiting. The fact that it was not a first-class novel was beside the point. Lord Melbourne's star had set and Prince Albert's was in the ascendant. The trend of the day was towards prosaic and strenuous living, yet romanticism was still the prevailing literary fashion, romanticism associated with the names of the vicious Byron, the atheistical Shelley, and such novelists as poor Caroline Lamb. Romanticism, in short, was bad. Charlotte took its reformation in hand, and in the character of Guy she turned romanticism into a respectable church-going creed. Guy was at one and the same time very good, very respectable, and very romantic. The public, who were all for sober virtue whilst cherishing at the same time a passion for romance, leapt at this reconciliation of apparent opposites. The Brontës, Scott, and other lesser novelists had shown virtuous and romantic characters, but no one before Charlotte had associated romance with everyday life as it was lived in the year 1853. She gave to each of her readers the hope of finding himself a hero. No need to live in the spacious times of Queen Elizabeth, to swim the Hellespont in Byronic manner, or to burden oneself with a mad wife like Mr. Rochester; merely say your prayers, act as a faithful member of the Church of England, refrain from losing your temper, and the halo of romance will be yours.

The Heir of Redclyffe is essentially a novel with a moral basis. Morality is a conspicuous characteristic of most of the novels of the period, but it is usually kept subservient to the plot. In *Jane Eyre*, for instance, Jane's scruples and subsequent flight from Mr. Rochester are used not so much to point a moral as to adorn a tale. Charlotte, however, is acutely concerned with moral issues, and the story which illustrates these issues is to her of secondary importance. In this she resembles the twentieth-century novelists whose concern is not with events but with reactions. Conrad, in *Lord Jim*, is not interested in the highly exciting story of the sinking of the *Patna*; all he cares for is the effect of that adventure on the mind of Jim. So for Charlotte, who was concerned with morality rather than psychology, the question is not whether Guy and Amy will marry but whether they will commit any moral *faux-pas* in the process of doing so. Of course no one expects to find Guy and Amy indulging in illicit love. Morality, for Charlotte, was a fine-drawn, high-falutin'

was as apparent to her contemporaries as to posterity, having nothing to do with changing codes or morals. Foolish, fond Mr. Edmondstone is persuaded by nephew Philip that Guy has fallen into extravagance and betting. Although he loves Guy like his own son he makes no attempt to see the boy, who was, after all, only twenty, and might well have betted occasionally without being, of necessity, hopelessly depraved. Instead, he forbids Guy the house and insists on breaking off the engagement with Amy. Philip's most inadequate evidence is believed against Guy's solemn word, although a baby could have seen that Guy was incapable of deception, betting, or, indeed, vice of any sort. In the end, of course, it turns out that Guy's mysterious request for the loan of £1000, the cause of all the trouble, is due to his laudable desire to endow a sisterhood. Plots were never Charlotte's strong point, as she herself admitted, and in *The Heir of Redclyffe* the thread of the story at times wears dangerously thin.

Character, not plot, is the strength of *The Heir of Redclyffe*. Young women of the 'fifties went into raptures over Guy Morville, and young men, dashing Guardsmen and undergraduates alike, including one named William Morris, endeavoured vainly to model themselves on his perfections, inspired by a desire to emulate "his almost deliquescent piety." Even today Guy retains his charm. No one could fail to appreciate the attractions of a young man who refuses to take his horse to Oxford lest the temptations of the University city should prove too much for the morals of his groom. Guy's touching death moved so many to tears that perhaps her success in this line prompted Charlotte to an overdose of death-bed scenes in later novels. None of them have the pathos of Guy's last hours. Felix Underwood and Margaret May pass away leaving the modern reader dry-eyed, but though smiles may break through at the romantic touch of the young widow wearing her wedding-dress to her husband's funeral, even today it is all too easy to weep for Guy.

Amy, the heroine, is a darling. Development is always marked in Charlotte's characters, and Amy develops naturally and inevitably from a simple laughing girl into a very fine and saintly woman. In appearance, as in character, she is enchanting. Her first entrance into the novel is a picture as vivid as if we had seen her with the eyes of the flesh. We know her face, her dress, her complexion, even her style of hair-dressing. Yet all the written description is condensed into two sentences.

"Suddenly a voice called 'Laura! Are you there? Open the door and you will see.'

"On Philip's opening it in came a tall camelia; the laughing face and light, shining curls of the bearer peeping through the dark green leaves."

By a magic peculiar to herself Charlotte can make her readers imagine what she does not describe. It is startling sometimes to look up chapter and verse and to discover how little basis of description there is for imagined pictures of places and people, clear and concrete in every detail.

The minor characters, pleasant, ordinary people all of them, are some of Charlotte's most successful bits of character-drawing. "Here," she seems to say, "are some nice-everyday friends of mine, not very exciting, not very unusual. But I am fond of them and I want to tell you all about them so that they can be your friends also." Soon the reader finds himself as much at his ease at Holywell House as Charlotte was at Otterbourne or Hursley. Even Philip, the Pharisee, is not so preposterous as Charlotte's other villains. He was not a wicked man but a prig, and prigs she understood almost too well. "Philip is intolerable and impossible," so runs the general verdict, "but somehow he reminds me of So-and-so." There are, unfortunately, large numbers of So-and-so's in this world all too reminiscent of the unbearable Philip. In his character Charlotte for the first and only time admitted that black is not always black nor white wholly and entirely white; Philip's tragedy is the fatal story of the would-be good man who deceives himself over the motives behind his actions.

The book was read eagerly by bishops and statesmen; Rossetti wept over Guy's untimely end, and from Dresden came a letter from Margaret, Princess Reuss. "As we have grown so fond of the personages we should like to know so very much if they are or have been living. Or at least like some living people, or else if they are imagined persons. We are of the latter conviction, for such characters, as especially dear Guy's and Amy's, are scarcely to be found on earth." All the world was anxious to meet the author of the most successful book of the day. But Charlotte was not to be spoilt and she had Mr. Keble to help her should she show any signs of losing her head in the midst of such universal applause and adulation. At the end of a letter to Marianne Dyson, dated February 23rd, 1853, and containing an attractive account of an afternoon spent at Hursley Vicarage, she adds this note, headed "Private":

"I should like you to know the comfort and peace I had in the little study at Hursley Vicarage yesterday. It is too precious to have him to bring all one's fear of vain-glory etc. to, and hear him say, 'Yes, my dear, I have been thinking a great deal about you now,' and when he said a successful book might be the trial of one's life—it was so exactly what was nice, not telling one not to enjoy the praise, and like to hear it talked about, but that way of at once soothing and guarding, and his telling me to think of the pleasure it was to my father and mother; and then beside

the safe-guard of prayer and offering of talents, etc. he said in this case I might dwell on how much it is yours, so you see you must not mind my sending it all to you. I wish I could give you the effect of the peacefulness and subduing happiness of it, especially when I asked for the blessing, and he said, 'You shall have it, such as it is,' and then he took the words he never used with me before, 'Prosper Thou her handiwork,' which seemed to seal a daily prayer, and make all bearable and not vain. The going back and chattering in the drawing-room did not hurt that twilight time, and then came a moonlight drive home. . . .

"I could not help telling you, but keep it to yourself. 'If you keep watch and go on in your own natural way, it will do you no harm,' he said."

The ungrammatical, disjointed sentences speak straight from the heart. "If you keep watch and go on in your own natural way"—but for Charlotte there was no other way possible. For many years she had to endure troubles Keble never contemplated when he warned her against the trial that a successful book might prove to be. Strangers would try to force themselves into her home, one American couple going so far as to declare that they had been to Stratford for Shakespeare, to Stoke Poges for Gray, to Hursley for Keble, and to Otterbourne for Charlotte Yonge, "last but not least." These "idolaters," as her family called them in jest, were hateful to Charlotte. Her natural kindness forbade her to send them away empty, and some concessions she had to make to the demands of importunate strangers, but her physical privacy was as dear to her as that privacy of soul which she guarded with such determined and delicate reserve.

Her dislike of fame was genuine, and in her reluctance to face the limelight there was none of the modern film-star's heavily publicised shrinking from publicity. Charlotte was bred up in a tradition that counted it a mark of good breeding to shun the public gaze. Nothing was more unfortunate than to find one's name "in the papers." The vulgar crowd, shouting noisy plaudits, inevitably tainted its idol with something of its own vulgarity. As a Victorian gentlewoman Charlotte could not do otherwise than struggle to avoid the consequences of her own success.

Instinctively she realised that no one could have been less fitted than she was for the position of a public heroine. A repressive system of education had exaggerated her natural shyness into a most painful handicap. Among those whom she knew and trusted Charlotte could be a delightful and eager conversationalist, but with strangers she became at once tongue-tied and clumsy, and her shyness at the few public functions

she was persuaded to attend was so marked as to be embarrassing to others as well as to herself.

But her avoidance of publicity had roots deeper than the conventions of her class and age, deeper even than the shyness ingrained in her own character. Was not her motto "Pro Ecclesia Dei"? She worked for the Church and the Church only. Though her work was a delight to her and brought her both money and fame she regarded it as a duty, not a pleasure. Praise for herself she did not desire; her only object was to add to the honour of the Church.

To write thus is to lay Charlotte open to the charge of very subtle hypocrisy. But there is a simplicity so obvious that it leaves the complicated mind of the average man gasping with disbelief. Charlotte's simplicity was of that order. She was clever, she was even, in her own way, brilliant, but she was as simple and direct as a child. More so, indeed, for the simplicity of children has been grossly exaggerated. If she said she wrote for the Church's honour and glory for the Church's honour and glory she wrote and for no other object. She accepted all the implications of that statement with breath-taking ease, and one of its more obvious implications was the entire unimportance of Charlotte. Those who thought otherwise she regarded as wrong-headed and a nuisance.

This was Charlotte at the height of her fame, a shy, awkward, brilliant creature, very little changed from the schoolgirl who printed *Le Château de Melville* to help pay for a village school. Daily life went on in the accustomed round of study and school-teaching, church services and visits to neighbours. The famous authoress spent her talent on contributions to *The Hursley Magazine*, edited and bound by Lady Heathcote, and on plays to be acted in the Moberly schoolroom at Winchester. In the affectionate warmth of the Moberly home Charlotte's habitual shyness melted away so completely that she even consented to act in some of her own plays. "I shall very much enjoy doing what I can in the preparations," she writes to Alice, the eldest daughter, "and I will try to grow as fat and dignified as I can in honour of her Majesty, Queen Philippa. You cannot think how I shall enjoy the fun of the rehearsals, and it will give me such a good opportunity for correcting any part of the play that may not have the right effect."

Another letter refers to *The Pigeon Pie*, a play of the Civil War period:

"Would George mind being the Colonel? He is never on the stage with Edmund, and a cloak and blue scarf would turn him into a Round-head. I do not see what else is to be done, for altering the part now would spoil the dinner scene. I am glad you are not more perfect in

your parts. I say mine every evening when I am going to bed, but I cannot leave off laughing in the wrong places, especially when I have to congratulate Edmund on his alteration since I saw him six years ago. Mr. Dunderhead lives in the little dressing-room, to the amazement of all beholders who come suddenly upon him in the twilight."

"Mr. Dunderhead" was a lay figure representing a soldier, a useful actor who appeared again in many plays. He was more accommodating than George, who "minded" the part of the Roundhead Colonel so much that he flatly refused to play it. So staunch was the Royalism of the Moberly family that no one could be persuaded to appear in this odious rôle except Fanny Yonge herself. Apparently George was inclined to be cantankerous over the parts allotted to him; in a letter dealing with another play, *The Strayed Falcon*, Charlotte says, "I hope George will not think too much sentiment falls to his share."

The Strayed Falcon and *The Mice at Play* were published years later in their original form, whilst *The Pigeon Pie* was worked up into a short story. In this simple tale of escaping Cavaliers and pursuing Roundheads the chief actors are a charming family of children. They include a pert little girl, whose behaviour is commented on in typical style: "Sylvester paid a good deal of attention to her, and she in return grew more forward and chattering. It is what little girls will sometimes do under the pleasure and excitement of the notice of gentlemen, and it makes their friends very uneasy, since the only excuse they can have is in being *very little*, and it shows a most undesirable want of self-command and love of attention." Even in Puslinch days any kind of childish flirtation had been anathema in the Yonge family. In the original play Charlotte herself took the part of the children's mother. This lady was, of course, a delicate invalid; even in the seventeenth century Charlotte could not imagine the maternal rôle separated from the enjoyment of ill-health.

Whilst other literary lions were showing themselves at opera or ballet these schoolroom plays were the sum total of Charlotte's theatrical pleasures. In the summer of 1853, when *The Heir of Redclyffe* was on the full tide of its successful course, three little Moberly girls came to stay at Otterbourne. Charlotte, who refused the gaieties waiting in London for the creator of Guy and Amy, gave herself up to the business of entertaining Dora, Kitty, and Emily. She taught them to recognise the various birds to be seen in the neighbourhood; she showed them her collection of shells and even set them to the collecting of snail shells as the only ones to be found round Winchester; she took them long walks by the river to gather water-flowers, with Rover, the brown water-s spaniel, jumping into the water and barking at the moor-hens.

The Moberlys had taken Fieldhouse Farm, near Otterbourne, as a holiday home, and every Sunday after evening service the Yonges would join them for talk on a hundred and one subjects.

Charlotte enjoyed the conversation most when it ran on military matters. "She loved to discuss the Peninsular War and every detail of the battle of Waterloo as she had heard of it through her uncle, Lord Seaton." A burning interest in the doings of the Army is characteristic of Charlotte. In *Musings over the Christian Year* she hastens to defend Keble, not against a charge of pacifism but against the mere suspicion that he was unconcerned by the Crimean War. Her words strike on modern ears with an oddly blood-thirsty and incongruous note. "He thoroughly enjoyed an account of a battle"—the mud of Passchendaele and the dive-bombers of Dunkirk are mercifully hidden in the mists of the future—"and had a ready insight into the meaning of details one would have thought out of his line."

This quiet life at Otterbourne was not an exciting existence for the popular novelist of the hour, but it was a happy one. Charlotte was as free as a child from all responsibility, her devoted parents still managing all the practical details of her life, and Keble ever ready to help her over more abstract problems, so that she was able to devote all her remarkable energy to her writing. Grief had not yet touched her friends or family. And though she might shun publicity she was not ashamed to confess that she enjoyed her huge success with *The Heir of Redclyffe*. In the years between 1851 and 1856, warmed by the glow of family affection and public approval, Charlotte produced the best of her novels.

CHAPTER SEVEN

“HALCYON DAYS PRECEDE storms.”

“Maybe they give strength for them.”

Thus Felix and Cherry in *The Pillars of the House*. Charlotte's halcyon days were short, but the strength she gained from them was not soon exhausted. Although her troubles began only a year after the publication of *The Heir of Redclyffe* her literary output continued serene and undisturbed by private grief.

As beffited his father's son, Julian Yonge was a soldier. In February 1854 his regiment was ordered overseas to fight in the Crimean War. Charlotte thrilled easily to the thought of military glory and she did not depress herself unduly over the impending departure of a brother for whom her affection, though genuine, had never been very intense. Her chief sorrow was vicarious grief for the sadness of her parents, forced to see their only son setting off for the wars. William Yonge went down to Portsmouth to say the final goodbye. Then from a totally unexpected quarter tragedy burst upon Charlotte's happy, ordered existence.

The mental and physical strain of that trying day of farewell overcame William Yonge, and on his return from Portsmouth he had a sudden apoplectic stroke. The blow was the worse because neither Fanny Yonge nor Charlotte had any inkling of the fact that William's health was in danger, although apparently James Yonge, the doctor uncle at Plymouth, had warned Julian of the likelihood of just such an attack. Charlotte had often suffered agonies of apprehension when she imagined her father ill or dead—“It is the very dread that has always haunted me,” she writes to Marianne Dyson, “and has been so like old visions that it seems like a dream”—but these imprecise terrors of a devoted and imaginative daughter were no true preparation for the reality of loss. For three days she deluded herself with hope, finding time to write two discursive and almost cheerful letters to Marianne. But her third letter, dated February 26th, is very brief:

“My trouble has come; he had a second attack and died at six to-night.

“Mamma is too like Amy, excited with thankfulness. I dread what it will be; I don't think we half believe it yet.

“You will write to me; perhaps I may write tomorrow, but I can't tell. We have Mr. and Mrs. Keble helping us tonight. Oh, what will

the waking be? So many of our Psalm superstitions have come true.
—Your most affectionate C. M. Y."

For Charlotte the blow was a crushing one. Like Hamlet, she could find no meaning in the obvious consolation, "You must know, your father lost a father, That father lost, lost his." The tie between William and Charlotte had been more than the ordinary love between father and daughter; it had been an emotion compounded of hero-worship, companionship, and entire sympathy. William Yonge had been Charlotte's idol, her playmate, and her master in the small and great things of life. Now he was gone and she was left like a ship without a rudder. Though written many years later, *The Pillars of the House* gives the clue to her feelings during those bitter February days. Felix Underwood was all in all to his brothers and sisters, and his death leaves a shattered household. Geraldine, the lame unmarried sister, is especially bereft. "The unmarried woman seldom escapes a widowhood of the spirit. There is sure to be someone, parent, brother, sister, friend, more comfortable to her than the day, with whom her life is so entwined that the wrench of parting leaves a torn void never entirely healed or filled, and this is above all the case when the separation is untimely, and the desolation is where lifelong hopes and dependence have been gathered up.

"Thus it was with Geraldine. Her brother had been the medium through which earth had love, joy, or interest for her. He was gone, and after her first annihilation she mourned less externally than some of the others, because she knew that she should mourn for life."

So Charlotte mourned for her father. But she gained as well as lost from her bereavement. Clear-sighted always where her own defects were concerned, Charlotte knew quite well the dangers of excessive dependence and hero-worship, or "Bild"-worship as she called it, preferring the German word. In a long and interesting letter to Marianne Dyson she discusses the whole problem, a problem which forms the theme of her later novel, *Hopes and Fears*. Charlotte's intellect always had her emotions well under control, and she distinguishes very neatly between the different kinds of "Bilds." Writing of the character then called Dorothea, but later known as Honora, heroine of *Hopes and Fears*, she says: "I believe she put her trust rather for happiness than for guidance, and I suspect it was idols rather than popes that she made." "I am very much afraid of live 'Bilds,'" she continues. Here for once Charlotte was less than honest with herself, for what were her father and John Keble to her but "Bilds," the one her idol, the other her pope? Perhaps she suspected as much herself, for she writes: "I have no certainty of not going off headlong into something very foolish, fancying it right. I

don't think I could while I have Papa to steady me, but I don't hold that as worship, first because he is my father and secondly because I don't think he is my pope." She was wrong, of course, but her devotion to her father was a more healthy and sound emotion than most "Bild"-worship. "Have a standard external to your 'Bild,'" is her advice, "and do not make your 'Bild' your standard."

Such a standard Charlotte herself found in her religion, and it was religion that helped her to face the loss of her "Bild" with courage and even with a certain cheerfulness. Her belief in a future life was profound and unquestioning. She was a frequent attendant at the daily Evensong in Winchester Cathedral, sometimes accompanied there by one or other of the Moberly children. A little girl who was one day her companion found her attention caught by the fact that Charlotte, alone in the congregation, turned Eastwards for the recitation of the Creed. She listened while Charlotte repeated the articles of her Belief with great earnestness, ending with "the Life Everlasting," spoken with such complete conviction that the child was awe-struck. "How much Miss Yonge means that!" she thought to herself afterwards. The impression made on the child-mind was never forgotten, and years later as an old woman she remembered and repeated the tiny incident.

Charlotte needed all her courage and cheerfulness to face the practical difficulties of life as well as her private grief. Julian was away on the high seas, unaware of his loss, and at home Fanny Yonge needed help with the hundred and one business details which William had always taken into his own hands. Charlotte never had any head for business; her letters to the contributors of *The Monthly Packet* are full of apologies for payments confused, contributions delayed, and similar mistakes. William Yonge had occasionally endeavoured to teach her to deal with her own affairs; he would stand over her whilst she attempted to grapple with a business letter, asking her how she would write such a thing when he was no longer there to do it for her, but for the most part it was fatally easy for him to attend to the matter himself rather than to conduct her slowly and painfully through the labyrinth of accounts and correspondence. In the smaller details of life she was as inexperienced as a child. William Yonge had never liked her to be "alone in a railway-station" or to make a journey by herself, although Charlotte was not a young woman whom any licentious stranger would dare to accost. Perhaps, knowing her habitual untidiness, William was more afraid that she would lose her ticket than her virtue.

At the age of thirty-one it was high time for her to grow up, and that she could never have done whilst her father was alive. Now,

however, as Felix Underwood said to his childish brother Bernard, "You'll swim for yourself when your plank has gone." Charlotte's efforts to swim in the sea of life were made easier for her by the help and support of the Kebles, best of friends. In spite of the biting cold weather, delicate Mrs. Keble came with her husband to Otterbourne as soon as she heard the news of William's death, and from that moment their kindness to the bereaved family never failed. After the funeral Anne Yonge from Puslinch came on a long visit, and with the Kebles and her beloved cousin at hand Charlotte found that she could take up ordinary life again with confidence and even with pleasure.

Greatest of all pleasures was work. As her letter to Marianne showed, even at the moment of deepest sorrow her mind was turning to the creatures of her imagination and she must needs compare her mother to the widowed Amy of *The Heir of Redclyffe*. At the time of her father's death *The Little Duke* was about to be published in book form, *Heartsease* was nearly finished, and *The Daisy Chain* was already on the stocks. Together with *The Heir of Redclyffe*, these three books represent the peak of Charlotte's achievement. *The Little Duke*, intended for young children, had first appeared in the early numbers of *The Monthly Packet*. It is a simple but vivid historical tale, which has won many hearts outside the magic circle of the true lovers of Charlotte. Readers who are bored by Guy Morville or Ethel May remember with pleasure their first introduction to the young Richard of Normandy, resplendent in his scarlet tunic. *The Little Duke* is free from the trace of mawkishness, the flavour of Wardour Street that hangs about the other historical novels; the language is pleasantly unstilted and Richard is neither impossibly good nor impossibly pious. Charlotte understood little boys, whether they lived in the ninth century or the nineteenth. The book is an almost certain success with any child between the ages of seven and ten, and their elders can enjoy the tale for its own sake, not merely for the memories it awakes of their own childhood's delight in the reading. *The Little Duke* is not typical of Charlotte's work, but impartial critics, who are not passionately prejudiced in favour of Mays, Mohuns, Merrifields and Underwoods, often judge it the best of all her books.

Heartsease, however, is of more interest to the real enthusiasts, who appreciate Charlotte best when she is most like herself. This novel is a study in contrasting characters. Theodora Martindale, high-born, high-minded, and inordinately self-willed, is horrified when her favourite brother, Arthur, marries beneath him. His wife, Violet, is a meek and unassuming little creature, despised by her husband's relations, but gradually her gentleness wins the way to their hearts, making her the

greatest influence for good in the family and enabling her to win her husband back from a life of vice and dissipation. Meanwhile the consciously virtuous Theodora alienates both her lover and her brother, and has to learn humility, and incidentally to lose her good looks, before she can win her way to peace and happiness.

Charlotte is never entirely at her ease in the highest social circles, and her peers are less attractive than her parsons. In *Heartsease* Lord Martindale, like Lord Ormersfield of *Dynevor Terrace*, is a study of a type common enough everywhere but perhaps most frequently found among the English upper classes. A conscientious and devoted man, doing his duty both as a parent and a citizen, he is too shy and too much afraid of any demonstration of feeling to be appreciated at his real worth either by his family or by the world at large. Home is a chilly, uninviting place because the father is hopelessly out of touch with his children although his affection for them is sincere and his concern for their welfare genuine. To one used to the intimacies of Otterbourne and Puslinch the Seatons' great house must have seemed formal and severe, and Charlotte probably drew upon recollections of her visits there when painting her pictures of Martindale and Ormersfield, although the grand old man, Lord Seaton, whom she had elevated almost to the position of a "Bild," could scarcely have served as a model for her two virtuous but inhibited peers. The other members of the Martindale family, with the exception of the preposterous old aunt, are all cleverly and carefully drawn, but they lack the life that breathes in the Edmondstones, the Mays, the Underwoods, and other less aristocratic characters.

In her book, *Charlotte Mary Yonge: an Appreciation*, Mrs. Romanes has some peculiar comments to make on *Heartsease*. She describes it as "a very clever story" which shows "a good deal of knowledge of the world, as the world appears to a lady who meets it in cultivated and well-born circles. There is just a slight and very distant knowledge of evil." Distant indeed was Charlotte's acquaintance with the fashionably wicked world where Arthur Martindale was led astray. Betting indeed she mentions specifically as one of the causes of his downfall. Other vices, however, remain unspecified, not because they were too black to mention but simply because she knew nothing at all, and wished to know nothing at all, about that horrid thing called dissipation. In polite Tractarian society the riotous living on which so many prodigal sons expended their patrimony was only referred to in hints and sorrowful asides. Some of Charlotte's characters, including the pious Clement Underwood, occasionally fall under the influence of intoxicating liquor, but never once does she bring herself to say outright that So-and-so was

drunk. Charlotte made Arthur's downfall a certainty by sending him into the Grenadiers. "Is he not rather wasted on the Guards?" asks someone of the attractive and virtuous Jock Brownlow in *Magnum Bonum*, but *Heartsease* is the book where Charlotte gives her dislike of the Guards the fullest play. From the moment when we first meet Arthur "in a house not far from the Winchester Barracks"—the second battalion of the Grenadiers was actually at Winchester during the summer of 1851—we know that his fate is sealed, and that there is no hope for his redemption until he resigns his commission.

Mrs. Romanes goes on to describe *Heartsease* as "in some respects an advance on *The Heir of Redclyffe*," an opinion in which Charles Kingsley would have concurred. Charlotte disliked Kingsley's religious views so much that at this period of her life she refused to read a word of his writings, and although she relented slightly in later years, she never could bring herself fully to appreciate *The Water Babies*. Kingsley, however, was more generous towards authors whose opinions he could not share, and after reading *Heartsease* he wrote an enthusiastic letter to John Parker, the publisher of the novel :

"My dear Parker,—I have just read for the first time *Heartsease* and I cannot lose a day before telling you that I think it the most delightful and wholesome novel I ever read. The delicate touches, moreover, of character I could mention are wonderful, and I found myself wiping my eyes a dozen times before I got through it. I don't wonder at the immense sale of the book, though at the same time it speaks much for the public taste that it has been so well received. You should be proud, and I doubt not are, that such a work should have come out of your house. Never mind what the *Times* or anyone else says; the book is wise and human and noble as well as Christian, and will surely become a standard book for aye and a day.—Yours ever faithfully, C. Kingsley."

The public, however, took the opposite view. Though *Heartsease* was bought and read by the thousand it never attained the popularity of *The Heir of Redclyffe*. Charlotte herself shrewdly commented on the new novel that "most people say they think others will like it as well as Guy, though they don't themselves." In the same letter she quotes the opinions of various correspondents. Judge Coleridge has "fallen foul of the geography of the Lakes"—and with good reason, for Charlotte had made Helvellyn a near neighbour to the Whitehaven coal-field. Another and more interesting critic remains anonymous: "my Colonel correspondent complains of the babies." Who was this mysterious Colonel and what was the exact nature of his complaint? Other people have seen reason to worry over the babies, and there are moments when

CHARLOTTE MARY

it is only possible to believe that Charlotte resembled that legendary aboriginal tribe beloved of anthropologists in her ignorance of the connection between birth and sex. There is a baffling passage in *The Clever Woman of the Family* when Bessie Keith falls over a croquet hoop (croquet had always been poor Bessie's undoing) and immediately produces a baby whose imminent arrival has barely been suggested. Bessie has indeed declared that her aunt is coming to her shortly, but only an expert in Victorian euphemism would equate the visit of an aunt with the birth of a baby. Even after the inauspicious tumble the word "baby" is not mentioned until the beginning of the next chapter: "As the uncle and nephew came out of the church and approached the yew-tree gate Rachel came swiftly to meet them. 'Oh, Alick! Oh, Uncle!' she said breathlessly, 'Bessie says she is shocked to turn your house upside down, but we could not go any further. And her baby is born!'" Without further comment Rachel, the baby's aunt, rushes on to the question of private baptism, leaving the surprised reader to make what he can of his unheralded birth.

At the end of *The Pillars of the House* Wilmet Harewood produces a child in just such an abrupt manner. *The Pillars* has other instances of unexpected births, and Mr. Underwood's feats of paternity make one gasp and stretch one's eyes. To beget thirteen children before dying of galloping consumption at the age of thirty-nine is no mean effort of propagation. Only in *The Heir of Redlyffe* is the expected arrival of a baby openly discussed, a book where it is most surprising to find the climax of the story turning upon the delicate question of the sex of an unborn child.

In real life Charlotte's attitude towards sexual problems was equally discreet and vague. She was well aware that her village girls and G.F.S. members could and did fall from grace, but she put all such lapses down to the lack of "modest behaviour." If girls were not "forward" and did not allow "liberties to be taken" nothing untoward need occur. The exact meaning of "taking liberties" she left undefined even to herself, and the thought of temptation from the natural desires of the flesh never crossed her mind. In *Conversations on the Catechism*, which she wrote for *The Monthly Packet* between 1851 and 1858, she comments on the Seventh Commandment, "I believe prudery is the tainted mind trying to assume the mask of modesty." No one ever had less need than Charlotte to assume such a mask, but there are times when her determined purity comes dangerously near the point where the virtue of innocence lapses into the folly of ignorance.

Many years later, *Last Heartsease Leaves* were printed privately "in

aid of the Eastleigh Church Enlargement Fund." This rarity among Yongeana is of no particular note, but it is interesting to enthusiasts who are anxious to know what the future held for Violet, Arthur, and Theodora. Arthur has been dead some years, and Johnnie, his pious son, has inherited the title. On coming of age he gives away the £150,000 which he had inherited from his wicked Aunt Nesbit, part going to Church funds and part to Theodora, who had been unjustly deprived of her inheritance. Theodora is shown as the happy wife of Percy Fotheringham, whom she married at the end of *Heartsease*, and her rejected suitor, Lord St. Erme, is rather improbably engaged to Helen, her young niece.

Heartsease was the last story which Charlotte was able to discuss with her father in anything approaching its completed form. She did not, however, indulge in any sentimentality on that account, and the new book was a great source of interest both to her and to her mother. Its enthusiastic reception, only less notable than that accorded *The Heir of Redclyffe*, and the various criticisms in the papers, served to distract them in the midst of their worry and grief. "It does want Papa very much," Charlotte writes, "but then, he did set it going, and there is Mamma to gloat over it." Distraction was badly needed, for following quickly on William Yonge's unexpected death came bad news of Julian from the seat of war in the Crimea. In the summer of 1854 he was laid low by sunstroke, a misfortune which befalls many of Charlotte's characters, and invalidated home after a severe illness. The young officer wandered round Otterbourne, like Lance in *The Pillars of the House*, wearing "a grass hat enfolded in an ample puggery and provided with a natty blue umbrella," and joy at his return was tempered by long anxiety over the state of his health. His army career was at an end, and life, which had seemed so easy for the Yonge family, was suddenly beset with care.

Charlotte, however, remained serene and enthusiastic as ever. Three closely connected interests absorbed her attention; foreign missions, the doings of the Moberly family, and her new book. The cheerful but serious Moberly household exactly suited Charlotte's temperament, and their house at Winchester became a second home to her. She wrote a poem to commemorate the friendship, although poetry was a form of literature at which Charlotte did not excel:

" O household blithe, whose epochs all
Are chronicles of gladness,
Few shades thy sunny dates recall
E'en of reflected sadness.

With chastened joy and pensive fears
Thou numberest o'er thy treasures,
Lest time should change the smile to tears
The reckoning for thy pleasures.

Nay, thankful love gives mirth the beams
That can illumine sorrow
For what are earth's best lights but gleams
From the eternal morrow ? ”

With Moberlys, as with Kebles and Yonges, foreign missions were “not so much a duty as a predominant interest.” In the early summer of 1854 the famous Bishop Selwyn of New Zealand was due to pay a visit to both Winchester and Hursley. Charlotte was much too shy to push herself forward, but her mother knew of her passionate interest in the bishop’s missionary work and resolved to do all the pushing that might be required. “I am bent upon Charlotte seeing all she can of Bishop Selwyn,” she writes to Mrs. Moberly, “and trust to Dr. Moberly to manage it for her, and must have her see Mrs. Selwyn somehow.” Dr. Moberly managed the matter to some effect, but it never seems to have crossed the mind of any of these pious enthusiasts that a famous author might well have claimed an introduction to a colonial bishop by right and not by grace.

The longed-for day began with a service in Winchester Cathedral ; “I am glad,” Charlotte wrote afterwards to Marianne, “that my first sight of the bishop was in his lawn sleeves.” The great moment came in the afternoon. “I had previously given £146-10-0 to Dr. Moberly for Maggie to present in an envelope whereon Mamma had written ‘For the vessel for the Island Mission.’” It is characteristic that it was “Mamma” who wrote the inscription, not Charlotte. The money was part of the proceeds of *The Heir of Redclyffe*, and “Maggie” was Margaret Moberly, Charlotte’s two-year-old god-daughter, whose name and birth-month were to be commemorated by the “Margaret Mays” of *The Daisy Chain*. As Charlotte was playing with the Moberly children in the Warden’s garden she saw Mr. Keble, Warden Barter and Bishop Selwyn approaching across the bridge, and, overcome by shyness, crept off to hide herself by the river-path. Little Maggie, more bold than her godmother, trotted across the lawn to deposit the precious envelope in the hands of “man,” as she disrespectfully called the bishop. Charlotte was not to escape the thanks which were her due ; Warden Barter called her back to be introduced to the great man, whose kindness and interest at once broke through the barrier of her reserve so that they were soon talking together eagerly of the subjects which they both had so much at heart.

After the missionary meeting the bishop insisted on escorting Charlotte back to College. A grand dinner followed, and then yet another meeting, where, "for a wonder, Anne and I fell in with the bishop again." The wonder was that Charlotte should be completely unsuspicuous of the fact that the bishop was just as interested in the authoress as the authoress in the bishop. "Happy girl," whispered Warden Barter in a gleeful aside, and Mr. Keble's eyes danced in congratulation. To these simple, saintly souls a missionary bishop was a far greater lion than the young and handsome woman who had written the most popular novel of the day. At half-past nine all was over, and Charlotte and Cousin Anne returned to Hursley to delight Fanny Yonge with their account of the day's doings, and especially with the bishop's witticism, "I suppose I am joint heir with the Heir of Redclyffe." "We feel much as if we had been to a ball," wrote Charlotte in a transport of delight over so much ecclesiastical dissipation.

For many years Charlotte habitually wore a pendant in the form of a gold St. Andrew's cross with an enamelled daisy in the centre. At the back was a small recess containing a curl of Margaret Moberly's hair and underneath was inscribed the date "June 1854." It was a gift from Fanny Yonge, and if the date recalled the great day of Bishop Selwyn's visit the form of the keepsake was emblematic of Charlotte's other great interest during the summer of 1854, the writing of her new book, *The Daisy Chain*.

The first idea of the tale came to her in June 1852 when Dr. Moberly asked her to be godmother to his youngest daughter. Delighted at the compliment, Charlotte wrote a charming letter in reply: "Indeed I do thank you and Mrs. Moberly very much for giving me a pearl to think of every day. I should like for her to be Margaret Helen, though as it is for the sake of nothing but some fancies of my own it does not deserve to be twice thought about. . . . I am sure this is weather to recover in and Daisies to thrive in." Helen was presumably for Helen Fotheringham of *Heartsease*, an incredibly virtuous lady who had been betrothed to Arthur Martindale's almost equally virtuous brother John, and who refused to marry him because of her obligations to her old and imbecile grandparents. Consumption had carried off this paragon before the action of the book opens, but her spirit haunts its pages and Charlotte clearly regarded her as the presiding genius of the tale. Margaret was to be the name of a better-known heroine. One of Charlotte's favourite hobbies was the history of Christian names, and her letter to Dr. Moberly shows that she was already preoccupied with the double meaning of Margaret, the pearl and the daisy. Those "fancies of my own" were soon taking definite shape and substance in her brain.

Every year a new baby punctually made its appearance in the Moberly family, so by the time Margaret Helen arrived the ceremonial attaching to a christening had become traditional. Kebles, Yonges, Barters and other like-minded friends attended in force, and a long procession wound its way from the headmaster's house to the College Chapel, each of the Moberly children who was as yet unconfirmed being escorted by his or her godparents. After the service Charlotte carried the infant back to Mrs. Moberly, reposing, like a proper Victorian mother, upon the sofa, and whispered that she intended writing a story about a good Margaret. The only person of that name in any of her previous books had been a highly unpleasant character in *The Heir of Redclyffe*.

Begun out of compliment to the youngest Moberly daughter, the connection between *The Daisy Chain* and the Moberly family grew to be almost uncanny. The eldest daughter, Alice, was only twenty when the book was published, so that the curious likeness between fact and fiction appears almost in the nature of prophecy. Flora May, the pretty second daughter of the story, marries a man called George. Mary Moberly, also pretty and also a second daughter, married another George, a coincidence which greatly distressed her, since the fictitious George Rivers was an unattractive person, not to be compared with the real George Ridding. Another and younger sister in fact as well as in fiction married a schoolmaster whose Christian name was Charles; and one of the Moberly brothers, Robert, won the Newdigate Prize Poem at Oxford just as Norman May did in the novel, which was published when Robert was ten years old. Charlotte's own Margaret Helen completed the chain of coincidence; she married Charles Awdry, who was in W. H. Smith's firm, and her namesake, Gertrude Margaret, the "Daisy" of *The Daisy Chain*, married Lance Underwood, also in a stationery and publishing business. No wonder that the Moberly family grew to dread the jokes of the local wits, who would always have it that "The Daisy Chain was in residence."

The book had been begun during William Yonge's lifetime, and he had read and criticised the early chapters, preferring Norman May to the other characters, and exclaiming with horror when poor Norman has a nervous breakdown, "But surely you do not mean to kill him." After her father's death Charlotte found that his place as the critic on the hearth was in some measure filled by the Moberly family, who were always ready to discuss the story. Charlotte wrote to Alice Moberly, returning from a visit to Oxford: "What a pleasure it will be to hear of all your doings, by which I hope *The Daisy Chain* will profit, as it has a Commemoration in it", and again to Alice: "Here are the last three

chapters. When it comes back it has to be added that Margaret gave her pearl ring to be worked into the chalice. I have gone into correspondence with College Street about Miss Bracey. I realised that it was necessary to be careful what was said, but did not suspect danger in that quarter. I know two good women together can argue each other nearly to death if they do not stop themselves." Miss Bracey was governess to the May girls, who were always hurting her over-sensitive feelings, and every lover of *The Daisy Chain* will remember the episode when Margaret gives her engagement ring to be set round the stem of the chalice belonging to Cocksmoor Church.

Many of the joys and sorrows of the time are worked into the story. Bishop Selwyn and the missionary meetings reappear at the end of the book, when Norman resolves to devote himself to missionary work in the diocese of New Zealand and addresses a large missionary meeting with striking effect. Stoneborough School is a faint reflection of Winchester, St. Andrew's Church at Cocksmoor reminds us that although the building of Otterbourne Church was finished long ago its adornment was a constant subject of interest, and the poignant description of the desolate household after the sudden death of Mrs. May must owe something to Charlotte's recent experience of grief. Born of her own hopes and fears and preoccupations, *The Daisy Chain* is the most human of Charlotte's novels.

The first part of *The Daisy Chain* appeared in 1853 in *The Monthly Packet*, but the whole story was not published in book form until 1856. Though it did not enjoy the immediate and phenomenal success of *The Heir of Redclyffe*, its popularity has been the more lasting, and today it is among the most frequently read of Charlotte's novels. Girton College Library possesses a letter written in 1872 to Sir William Heathcote by Mr. Austen Leigh, a competent critic and nephew to Jane Austen. He writes: "I have just been reading Miss Yonge's *Daisy Chain*, I am not sure whether for the second or third time. I wonder where it is ranked in her own estimation. I place it very high among her works, and consider it a model specimen of her peculiar powers. No one else could have written anything like it. The variety of the characters, the nice discrimination of their shades, the force with which they are drawn, the whole process of their development, strike me as admirable, and in spite of one or two little mistakes (such as making the boys catch crayfish in what must have been a tributary of the Severn or the Wye, where they do not exist) make me place it very high, not only amongst her works, but in the general region of fiction. Like Walter Scott's novels, and my own Aunt's, I am never weary of reading it." Sir William Heathcote

must have sent this letter on to Charlotte, for Miss Coleridge prints the reply: "Many warm thanks for sending me Mr. Austen Leigh's kind comment on the Daisies. I believe I enjoyed them most, which is the best way to make a thing prosper. I am afraid the moral is not good, but I have always found that what one likes best one does best. As for the crayfish, I did not know they were so local, having always associated them with rivers, and they do not proclaim their presence like nightingales. Altogether it is such a story of young people and chatter that it always especially amazes and pleases me when such judges care for it."

It is difficult to criticise a tale so dearly loved, a constant companion for a quarter of a century and comforter in a hundred troubles, great and small. To point out its faults seems almost as impious as to criticise the face and figure of a beloved parent. Faults there are, of course, obvious even to the most devoted, and the worst of them is the invalid sister, Margaret. There is far too much of Margaret; unlike Ethel, we find no difficulty whatsoever in believing that the first wakening to the knowledge that Margaret was gone could have been more fraught with relief than with misery. The only moment when this pious invalid awakes a spark of interest is the occasion when she decks herself in a cap trimmed with little white puffs, much to the disgust of her spartan sister Ethel. Throughout the story Margaret is a sad bore, but without her the May family would not have been altogether their same delightful selves, and if Margaret is necessary to the complete development of the Mays then she must be endured with patience.

Another serious fault is the confusion of plot. Construction was never Charlotte's strong point, and in this respect *The Daisy Chain* is weak indeed. The original idea was to illustrate the difference between real achievement and popular success, hence the alternative title of *Aspirations*. Apparently Margaret's thwarted aspirations towards Alan Ernescliffe and the sublimation of Norman's early craving for fame were to be contrasted with the worldly success of Flora, the second sister. Margaret was to have been the chief character, but Ethel, dear, clever, untidy Ethel, stole the story for herself. Charlotte soon became so absorbed in the May family, and especially in Ethel, that she abandoned all ideas of underlying moral or logical construction and let the characters lead her where they would. The finished result she described as "a Family Chronicle, a domestic record of home events during those years of early life when the character is formed, and an endeavour to trace the effects of those aspirations which are a part of every youthful nature."

The story is simple, almost non-existent, although incident is plentiful. Dr. May is an impulsive, kind-hearted, quick-tempered man

who, by an accident for which he was largely to blame, is left a widower with eleven children on his hands. Mrs. May and the eldest girl, Margaret, are involved in a driving accident; the mother is killed and the daughter left bedridden for life. The government of the household is in the hands of this bedridden girl, helped by the competent but worldly Flora, but gradually Ethel, the third sister, assumes a more and more important place in the family until, with Flora married and Margaret dying, she becomes the person upon whom the whole family depends. At the beginning of the book Ethel is a *harum-scarum* fifteen-year-old, brilliant indeed at book-learning but so clumsy in practical matters that she cannot even stick a pin in straight. Through self-discipline she develops into a remarkable woman, eccentric perhaps, but full of common sense and a creature of great spiritual and mental force. Ethel is in fact very like Charlotte herself, although Charlotte never succeeded in conquering her practical deficiencies. Perhaps if she had been left in charge of a large motherless family she might have developed by force of circumstance into just such a one as Ethel May.

Character, however, and not circumstance, was the real power that went to the making of Ethel. Her aunt, Mrs. Arnott, summed her up thus: "There is something curiously winning in that quaint, quick decisive manner of hers. There is so much soul in the least thing she does, as if she could not be indifferent for a moment." "So much soul"—there lies Ethel May's secret strength and Charlotte's as well. Miss Annie Moberly wrote: "Miss Yonge's life was a wonderful example of the self-controlled vivacity of high spiritual existence. . . . Her own character of natural dependence and light-heartedness was converted by steadfast Christian endeavour into one of singular force and dignity." Light-hearted and dependent Ethel May never was, but her slipshod habits, her incontrollable temper, her uncouth manners all turn into real dignity of mind and manner. Religion it was that wrought the change in Ethel as well as Charlotte, but a severely practical and unemotional religion that manifested itself in such ways as attending daily service, teaching in Sunday School, and giving up small pleasures such as novel reading or, as in Ethel's case, the entrancing study of Greek Grammar. It is all very simple, very child-like, very direct, and after ninety years its sincerity still rings true.

Ethel's aspirations find their chief outlet at Cocksmoor, a neglected, poverty-stricken hamlet where she starts a school. Her great ambition is to build a church there, and ultimately her wish is fulfilled, though in an unexpected manner. Alan Ernescliffe, Margaret's sailor lover, dies in the South Seas, and by his will leaves his money to be spent on the

building of a church at Cocksmoor. Ethel delights in giving all the credit to Alan and Margaret, too self-forgetful to see that her patient work and devotion have played the largest part in the achievement of her girlhood's wish.

After Ethel, Dr. May is the central character in *The Daisy Chain*, and, like Ethel, he is a character who is developing all the time. At the beginning of the story he is a cheerful, irresponsible man, very young for his forty-two years, at heart as good as gold, but suffering from a temper that is apt to lead him into much trouble. The loss of his wife sobers him, and helped by his high religious principles he develops into a wise and deeply loved head of the family, but he never loses his quick, boyish charm. Dear Dr. May! Many are the readers who have longed to meet you in the flesh. In all her innumerable books Charlotte never created a more attractive character.

All the other Mays are dear and much-loved friends, even naughty Flora, whose absorption in the cares of this world led to such tragic results. Charlotte had no patience with the Floras of the world and pursued them like an avenging fury with misfortunes which they hardly merited, for surely the death of Flora's baby was an unnecessarily heavy punishment for a course of action which amounted in honest fact to nothing more than an attempt to make the best she could of her somewhat unsatisfactory marriage. Richard, precise, dependable, and a little stupid—"all I knew of Richard until last night," said Dr. Spencer, the Mays' old friend, "was that no one could, by any possibility, call him Dick"; the brilliant, nervous Norman; sailor Harry, boyish and simple-minded; Tom, deceitful and dirty as a little boy but developing later into an Eton dandy of promising scientific tastes; dull but devoted Mary; flirtatious little Blanche; the precocious child Aubrey; and little Gertrude Margaret, spoilt Daisy of the family—all have their own personalities, even their own forms and features so clearly distinguished that if we met any of them in the street there would be no mistaking Tom for Aubrey or Blanche for Flora.

But how describe the May family, how explain magic to those who have never fallen under its spell? The true addict has read *The Daisy Chain* not once but a hundred times; every word is dear and familiar, a text as sacrosanct as Holy Writ. Outsiders will read the story with interest, even with appreciation, and then sit down to compare it with *Little Women*. "Yes," cries the enthusiast, the initiate, "Miss Alcott is a better writer than Miss Yonge, and *Little Women* a real work of art. But I don't want works of art; I want Ethel and dear Dr. May." This attitude is indefensible and not a little crazy, only to be understood by

those who are also struck down by the May madness. What else could make busy readers wade through the dreary pages of *The Long Vacation* and *Modern Broods*, literary lapses perpetrated by the old and weary Charlotte, simply because in these shapeless stories Aubrey reappears as a gunner, Richard as the vicar of a North Country industrial town, and Flora as a middle-aged widow devoting herself to good works after the death of her husband in a riding accident? Most enthusiasts were brought up from their earliest years to love *The Daisy Chain*, but many have fallen victims to the passion later in life. Some are born mad, some achieve madness, and some, the unfortunate husbands, brothers, or sisters of these maniacs, have the Mays thrust upon them.

CHAPTER EIGHT

THE PUBLICATION OF *The Daisy Chain* marks a climacteric. Innumerable books were to follow it, some of them little if at all inferior to their predecessors, but they were to be the works not of youth but of maturity. *The Daisy Chain* alone combines the freshness of the young Charlotte with the assurance and fluency of the middle-aged Miss Yonge. She has found her style and her public, and from now onwards she will write in that style as her public expect. All successful authors reach a stage in their careers when the critics begin reviews with some such phrase as "another new book by So-and-so." Two or three new books by Miss Yonge were to be familiar features of every publishing season for the next forty years, until with the passage of time she was to grow from a popular author into a British institution.

In 1856 Charlotte was thirty-three, the age which many authorities, from St. Augustine downwards, describe as the period of highest development in life. It is an age when most people take stock of their position, summing up as best they may the achievements and failures of their youth and looking forward with more or less equanimity to the prospect lying before them in the future. The years of change and development are over, the years of decline are still far ahead. At thirty-three the individual character has set in the mould which has given it shape and the path of life should be tolerably clear to see.

So it was with Charlotte. She was not given to introspection, but she well knew the value of spiritual and mental stocktaking as apart from the regular practice of Private Confession, which she had begun to practise under the direction of John Keble. At the end of *The Daisy Chain* Ethel stands in the Church porch at Cocksmoor, thinking over past and future. "For herself Ethel looked back and looked on." So Charlotte must have taken stock of herself, standing perhaps by Otterbourne Church or, like other and less pious young ladies, in front of her dressing-table mirror. Almost without desiring it she had attained success. Her standing in the literary world was secure; no one fancied her a novelist of high artistic merit, but in her own line she was unchallenged. So far, so good, but if her public position as a popular author was unquestioned so too was her private status as a spinster. In the Victorian era the chances of marriage after the age of thirty were slight indeed, and Charlotte knew well that from now onwards she must regard herself as an old maid. Why? Her reflection in the mirror gave no sort

of an answer ; she saw there not indeed the pretty girl of fifteen years back but a woman handsome and intelligent enough to please most tastes. A few of her old pupils at Otterbourne School are still alive, and one of them was emphatic when questioned about Charlotte's personal appearance. "Pretty ? I should say she *was* pretty. And she always had a smile on her face. She could have married many times but her mother did not want to lose her." Such was the opinion of the village, and local gossips believed that the parson, Mr. Bigg-Wither, remained single all his life for Charlotte's sake. Ten years her senior, and burdened with a remarkable array of peculiarities and prejudices, Mr. Bigg-Wither can hardly have been a very prepossessing suitor. After he left Otterbourne in 1871 Charlotte wrote to him every Sunday until the day of his death, an odd proceeding for one so prudish if indeed he had ever proposed and been rejected.

Rumour has it that a distinguished soldier was in love with Charlotte. The story is unconfirmed either by written evidence or by family tradition, but it cannot be ruled out as inherently improbable. On Christmas Eve, 1850, Dr. Moberly fell in with Major Wilbraham (afterwards General Sir Richard Wilbraham) on his way back from Cathedral service. Major Wilbraham had a sad Christmas before him, having just lost his young and much-loved wife, and kind Dr. Moberly invited him home to join the family party. A friendship at once sprang up ; the Wilbraham family soon became intimates both of the headmaster's house at Winchester and of Hursley Parsonage, and one of the Wilbraham sisters contributed regularly to *The Monthly Packet*. Charlotte at this time was on the very crest of the wave, happy in her home life and pre-eminently successful as an author. Although a member of the Wilbraham family has recorded that in ordinary society her manner appeared "didactic" and that "her mode of shaking hands was almost repellent since she just pushed your hand back as if she wished to get rid of you," Major Wilbraham must have met her most frequently in company with the Kebles or the Moberlys, in a setting where she could cast shyness aside and emerge as a clever and entertaining creature. Seen thus, her handsome face and brilliant conversation were enough to attract any man who did not demand that women should be in the height of fashion.

If the proposal were ever made it is sad to think that it should have been rejected. The Army connection would have appealed greatly to Charlotte, and there would have been other more important bonds in common. Wilbrahams and Yonges were in the same tradition, intelligent, God-fearing country families of long descent, interested in all things literary, deeply concerned with charitable schemes, and devoted adherents

of the Church of England. There could, indeed, have been no more suitable match.

Whatever may be the truth about Sir Richard Wilbraham, in the light of the love-scenes from the novels it is clear that Charlotte had but little experience of proposals. Take, for instance, the scene between Percy Fotheringham and Theodora in *Heartsease*:

“Theodora, Theodora, you are a grand creature, nearly thrown away for want of breaking in.”

“Too true,” said she sadly.

“I must say it. Will you let me? Will you trust yourself and your happiness to me? It has been the vision and the hope of my solitude to see you what you might be! The flaws in your noble nature corrected, its grandeur and devotedness shining forth undimmed. Together we would crush the serpents, bring forth all that is excellent.”

“I think there might be a chance for me with you,” said she, in an odd sort of tone.

“You mean it?” he exclaimed, trying to see her face.

“I do. You appreciate me.”

“She let him walk beside her and hold the umbrella over her, but not a word was spoken until they were ascending the steps, when she said, ‘Don’t tell Papa tonight. I do not choose to look foolish.’

“Good luck to thee, umbrella!” said Percy, holding it on high ere closing it. ‘Thy sea-green dome has been a canopy of bliss. Honour to thy whale-bones!’ Then, in a very different manner, ‘Oh! Theodora, could you but guess how you have mingled in every scheme and wish of mine; how often I have laughed myself to scorn for dreaming, as if there could be any chance!’”

This is hardly the way in which young women are wooed and won in real life. And what Charlotte had not experienced for herself she had but little chance of learning at second-hand. Almost all her intimate friends were spinsters; it is impossible to imagine Charlotte and Marianne Dyson, for instance, indulging in bed-time confidences about lovers and love-making.

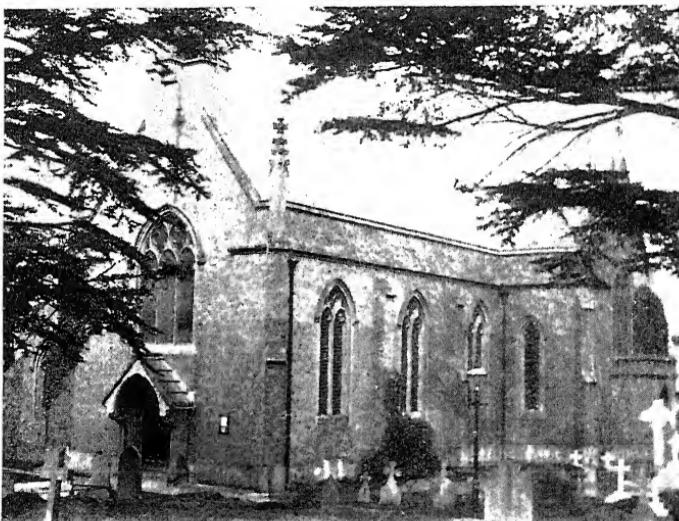
There is, of course, no mention of any love-affair in the brief chapter of autobiography characteristically entitled *Young Ladyhood*. Any hint at such delicate matters would immediately bring the young lady down to the level of the mere young woman. It is incredible that the attractive girl of Richmond’s portrait never fluttered one heart or felt any flutterings at her own, but nothing remains to guide our guesses; no letter, no recorded word, no allusion, however thickly veiled, survives to show who may have loved Charlotte, or who may have been beloved by her.



CHARLOTTE YONGE, *aet. 35*



OTTERBOURNE OLD CHURCH



OTTERBOURNE NEW CHURCH

Where no direct evidence exists it is permissible to use the novels as a basis for speculation. The lovers she draws are unconvincing portraits. The most lifelike are Guy and Amy, who suffer and submit to parental discipline, a discipline which Charlotte knew at first hand as she never knew the emotion of love. This may be the clue to the riddle; perhaps her old scholar was right in saying that Charlotte remained an old maid because of her mother. It may be simply that she never met anyone whom she preferred to her parents; she was not a brow-beaten and repressed daughter but a young woman whose home life was almost too happy. Whilst her father lived she could want no one else; when he was dead she may well have thought that her duty to her widowed mother precluded any thought of marriage.

In spite of her good looks, Charlotte was not a woman to appeal to the average male. She had an alarming and well-deserved reputation for cleverness, she was shy and at her worst on social occasions, and she was totally oblivious of her dress and appearance. She could look magnificent on the rare occasions when "she allowed herself to be clad in most becoming garments," but in ordinary life her clothes were such that even the unworldly Mrs. Sumner, founder of the Mothers' Union, thought it necessary to register a protest. Most women, however uninterested in fashion, have some rudimentary feeling for dress, but Charlotte was born without dress-sense as some people are born without an ear for music or lacking in any appreciation of poetry. She refers to "that special trial of womankind, the garb in which we clothe ourselves," and her ideas of what was suitable probably coincided with Ethel's, who felt very respectable "in a white muslin made high, a black mantle, and a brown hat."

For all her indifference to dress, Charlotte had a few fixed ideas on the subject, and one of them was an antipathy to bonnets that did not modestly shade the face. Opprobrious references to such inadequate headgear are frequent in the novels, and later on, in the book of essays entitled *Womankind*, she expresses herself very firmly on the subject: "Exposure of the face is one of the great tendencies of the time; and though it is not exactly indelicate in itself, yet the bold confronting of notice that is involved in going out with a totally unprotected countenance, thrown into prominence by the headdress, cannot be modest in itself; nor does a veil coming close over the nose materially alter the matter. Many perfectly retiring quiet girls adopt it simply from custom, and their refined faces cannot be entirely spoilt by it; but when the same hat is perched on a coarse face the evil of the example is apparent."

When she could bring herself to pay any attention to dress, Charlotte's demands were unexpectedly lordly: "a good silk made as simply as possible, and fitting perfectly, is the most ladylike of dresses and moreover does the least harm." Most ladylike indeed, and most to be desired, but, like a virtuous woman, "a good silk, fitting perfectly," is priced beyond rubies. All through life Charlotte instinctively demanded the best. As Miss Coleridge remarked rather plaintively, "she never knew that things could be got cheap and so her good girls had to do without them; this personally used to annoy me very much."

Draped in garments which offended against every canon of fashion, her handsome face eclipsed by a modest and out-moded bonnet, Charlotte was not a woman to inspire proposals of marriage from any but the most unworldly and devoted young men. It has been suggested that the love of Charlotte's life was just such a young man, John Coleridge Patteson, afterwards Bishop of Melanesia. Apart from the fact that she only met him twice, the massive biography that she wrote of him does not read like the work of one who cherished any sort of sentimental attachment for her subject. Norman May, of course, bears some resemblance to "Coley" Patteson, but his South Sea aspirations were inspired by another bishop, and with the best will in the world it is impossible to read any personal feeling into his love-affairs, which are the dullest part of *The Daisy Chain*. But the dear *Daisy Chain* contains a hint which may point to the solution of the riddle of Charlotte's affections. Alan Ernescliffe and Margaret, Norman and Meta, are wooden enough lovers, but real feeling and pathos mark the relationship between Mary May and her brother Harry. The love between these two, as between Felix and Geraldine Underwood in *The Pillars of the House*, is far more emotional than the ordinary tie linking brothers and sisters. When Harry is reported drowned Mary's grief is widow-like in its intensity, and later on, in *The Trial*, the sequel to *The Daisy Chain*, she refuses to accept Charles Cheviot, whom she dearly loves, until she is assured of Harry's approval.

Harry was a sailor, as charming as all the other sailors in Charlotte's stories. She herself had a sailor cousin at Puslinch, John Yonge. Charlotte and John were of an age; as children they played together as brother and sister, and when Charlotte pictures the brother and sister relationship it is of John, and not of Julian, that she is unconsciously thinking. Fanny Yonge was right when she described herself as the mother of two only children, for the gap in age between Charlotte and Julian was too great to be bridged easily. Cousins took the place of brothers to Charlotte, and after the early death of Jemmie at Plymouth, John was the nearest

and dearest of all the boy cousins. Emotions other than brotherly and sisterly affection can and do exist between cousins. Charlotte had, however, been brought up to know that in her case such emotions were forbidden, for William Yonge had a horror of marriage between near relations, a practice that had been all too common in the Yonge family. Childish flirtation between the cousins was severely suppressed : "Let me mention that our intercourse was free from that absurd and harmful pretence at love-making between boy and girl which it is with some the fashion to treat as a capital joke. Our mothers alike viewed it as foolish in itself and likely to lead to further nonsense, if to nothing worse. Any symptom on either side was squashed with grave displeasure as an impropriety. We talked and played as brother and sister, but before we were in our teens we were told that we were too old to write to each other."

John was to be a brother and nothing more. But emotions are none the less present because they are not called by their right names. There is no direct evidence one way or the other, but it is at least possible that Charlotte lived through childhood and early youth in a sisterly relationship with John, that later she loved him, perhaps only a little, perhaps only subconsciously, realising all the time that there could be between them no closer tie than the old affection that had existed ever since nursery days. What more natural than that she should take her relationship with John as a model when writing of the affection between brothers and sisters, never admitting to herself that there was in that relationship any note of passion ? The depth of her feeling for John would inevitably make her describe the love between Harry and Mary, Felix and Geraldine, as a warmer emotion than brothers and sisters usually experience.

To speculate thus is not to accuse Charlotte of unnatural complexes or desires. Fantastic indeed would be the picture of that innocent and upright Victorian lady in the guise of a psychological monster. It is a far cry from Byron and Augusta to John and Charlotte Yonge, who were, after all, not even first cousins. If she sometimes seems to confuse sisterly affection with another kind of feeling it is because Charlotte knows too little of love and not too much.

Even if these speculations are correct, Charlotte's feeling for John does not exclude the possibility of other abortive or unhappy love-affairs. Charlotte once said to Miss Wordsworth, "I have had a great deal of affection in my life, but not from the people I cared for most." Was this a reference to her stern upbringing or to Julian Yonge's undemonstrative nature, or was she thinking of someone outside the family circle ? *The Daisy Chain* suggests as much, and so does *Hopes and Fears*,

a later novel, whose heroine, Honora, bears some resemblance to Charlotte. Though she fails with her acknowledged lovers, Charlotte can draw the romantic beginnings of love very prettily. The scarcely awakened romance in *The Daisy Chain* between Ethel and Norman Ogilvie is far more convincing than the full-blown affair of Norman and Meta. Most people forget too soon the charm of those first tentative moments of love-making; not so Charlotte, whose memory was not overlaid by later and more deeply felt experiences. But here again everything is guesswork. Ethel threw away the fern spray that was her only keepsake, and in all probability no withered flowers, no letters tied up with blue ribbon, went to swell the disastrous bonfire that Miss Coleridge made of Charlotte's private papers and possessions.

Hopes and Fears suggests that Charlotte may have felt a deeper attachment than the fleeting first love of youth. Honora wastes her youth in an unsatisfactory devotion to a faithless young parson, only to discover too late that her real love was for her cousin Humfrey Charlecote, whose proposals she had twice rejected. Perhaps it is significant that Honora and Humfrey, like Ethel and Norman Ogilvie, are cousins, but in the absence of any sort of evidence it is impossible to discover who may have played the part of Humfrey in real life, tempting though it is to let imagination run riot.

All these guesses, intriguing though they may be, are not of the first importance in the study of Charlotte's character. Love, or the lack of it, played a very small part in her life, and sentimental relationships were matters over which she could feel only a lukewarm interest. What mattered to her were her home, her work and, above all, her religion. So Charlotte stood, like Ethel, at the parting of the ways between youth and middle-age, and, like Ethel, deliberately accepted loneliness as her lot. Although her immediate family was small and home ties negligible compared with Ethel's duty towards her ten brothers and sisters, Charlotte had a great sense of family feeling and felt herself bound by close ties to all the members of the circle in which she moved. Solitary she was not, but it was of herself as well as Ethel that she was thinking when she wrote: "She had begun to understand that the unmarried woman must not seek for undivided return of affection, and must not set her love, with exclusive eagerness, on aught below, but must be ready to cease in turn to be first with any. To love each heartily, to do her utmost for each in turn and to be grateful for their fondness was her call; but never to count on their affection as her sole right and unalienable possession. She felt that this was the probable course, and that she might look to becoming comparatively solitary in the course of years, then tried to

imagine what her lonely life might be, but broke off smiling at herself."

Charlotte too must have broken off the train of thought smiling at herself, for she was fundamentally an optimist and a happy creature. The prospect before her was not unattractive, and, like Ethel, she saw its dreary places transfigured in the glow of her religion. "My course and my aim are straight on and He will direct my paths." The seed which John Keble had planted had grown into a mighty tree, and reticent as Charlotte was, even children could see what was the moving power of her life. Annie Moberly, writing of her childhood's memories of Moberlys, Yonges, and Kebles, says: "Theology was to them a thrilling interest, and they moved and spoke and thought with unseen presences round them. Though no word about the Vision was suffered in our hearing out of church but with hushed voices and bated breath, yet the troops of children by whom they were surrounded did not miss the significance." And, speaking specifically of Charlotte, she adds: "Miss Yonge was comparatively young when we boys and girls first realised her, and the same interest in surroundings, yet detachment from them, was noticeable in her." Then, mentioning various incidents connected with her fame as an author: "These most exciting and unusual additions to a country life never seemed to matter much. Intensely enjoyed as they were, such incidents only accentuated to her the need of living the spiritual life more entirely. She was never lost in her daily occupations. Her collections, her botany, her astonishing knowledge of historical persons, her clever stories and village interests, and duties of friendship so delightful to her eager mind"—it is significant that authorship comes so low in the catalogue—"were always controlled to form material for higher perception in spiritual realities. They were interesting to the extent to which they might do service to Christ, on Whom her whole heart was set; otherwise they came and went, and her life would have been as complete without them."

So Charlotte turned away from her self-contemplation, content on the whole with her lot in life both private and public. Being the most humble of women, she could not guess that discerning people saw in the spinster author some of the makings of a saint.

Though Charlotte was not to have a wedding of her own she delighted, like most old maids, in the weddings of others. In the autumn of 1857 she crossed to Ireland to act as bridesmaid at the wedding of her cousin, Jane Colborne, daughter of Lord Seaton, who was at that time Governor of the Royal Hospital at Dublin. She wrote to her mother a vivid account of the ceremony, noting the bridesmaids' dresses, "white, picked

out with blue," and the suitably bashful demeanour of the bride, "Jane's bending, shrinking towards him was the prettiest, most bride-like thing I ever saw." After the wedding came a great excursion to Glendalough, a scene which was to serve as the setting for one of the episodes in *Hopes and Fears*.

Exactly a year later an important wedding occurred nearer home. Julian Yonge, now recovered from his sunstroke but retired from the Army, married Frances Walter on August 25th, 1858, and brought his nineteen-year-old bride to share the family home at Otterbourne, thus repeating the situation of thirty-six years earlier, when William and another Frances Yonge set up house with a mother-in-law. The girl-wife did not find life too easy. Otterbourne House had a life of its own with which she had no concern. Julian's Army career had taken him from home so much that Otterbourne had come to be almost exclusively connected with Fanny Yonge and Charlotte, a centre of pious and intellectual activities in which the soldier and his bride could have very little share. Even their belongings could hardly find a place amongst the accumulation of family treasures with which the house was stored. The great Bible that was Mr. Keble's wedding gift was sure of a place among the Yonge family gods, but where could Frances find room to display the "pretty little obelisk with a white flower at the base," or the two plates painted with sweet williams?

Feeling that her longing for a sister was at last to be satisfied, Charlotte was all kindness and delight, but some disappointment was inevitable. A stranger to the charmed circle of Yonges, Kebles and Moberlys, and especially such a very young stranger as Frances, could hardly be expected to breathe freely in what Miss Coleridge describes as "the rather peculiar intellectual atmosphere." How could a pretty girl of nineteen appreciate a woman of thirty-five whose interests were entirely intellectual and religious?

But although Frances was not the type of young woman to fall under the spell, Charlotte's influence over girls of all classes was immense. She wrote her stories primarily for girlish readers, and she had an inexhaustible interest in girlhood and its problems. It was no wonder that she found herself the centre of an admiring group of earnest young maidens, who, as one of them wrote long afterwards, "almost lived on her works," endeavouring to model themselves on her heroines. Some of these young enthusiasts banded themselves into a society whose chief aim was to improve the minds of its members, and one of them, greatly daring, proposed that their dear Miss Yonge should be asked to be the presiding spirit. Charlotte consented, and for fifteen years, from

1859 to 1874, she reigned as "Mother Goose" over her brood of "goslings."

Nearly all of these goslings came from the select circle where Mother Goose herself was most at home. They included a large group of Coleridges and Moberlys with their satellite Martyns and Awdrys, Miss Butler, daughter of the famous Tractarian Vicar of Wantage, and even, for a short while, Miss Arnold, better known as Mrs. Humphry Ward. The standard of intellect was obviously high, but it must be confessed that *The Barnacle*, a manuscript magazine which first appeared in 1863, has a sadly amateurish air about it. To turn over the pages and pages of historical tales written in a fine Italian hand; to smile at the verses—"Reverence the aged, And honour white hair, To be hoary is glory, So virtue be there"; to guess at the so innocuous riddles—"What is another name for Land's End? Water's beginning"; to admire these carefully copied illustrations from standard editions of Scott, these little vignettes of Indian life always drawn slightly out of perspective, or the water-colour of a fair-haired beauty leaning over a most peculiar parapet whilst her lover holds up a red rose, is to be transported into the forgotten world of Victorian schoolrooms, where School Certificate was unknown and life flowed in a slow smooth stream, an infinitely alluring contrast to these days when the smallest child is caught up in the hurrying whirl of modern education. Plenty of time in 1863 to brush out those immense plaits of hair, to toast muffins slowly in front of a coal fire, to embroider antimacassar, tea-cosy, or cushion-cover whilst an equally leisured cousin or sister read aloud these interminable tales. And even if you drew as badly as most of the illustrators of *The Barnacle* no one complained that you were wasting your time in the attempt, for there was always time enough and to spare.

The Barnacle was first started in order to fill some of that endless spare time. By any ordinary standard Charlotte's own days should have been completely occupied. She was editing *The Monthly Packet*, writing several books, teaching in school, and attending to her various hobbies, yet she could spare the time to copy out the whole of "The Prince and the Page," and various other stories, to write prefaces of ponderous humour, to set competitions and propound riddles, and even to attend to the prosaic business of binding and posting *The Barnacle*. She kept a critical eye on the contributions and severely censured a poem dealing with the *Alabama* incident during the American Civil War. Charlotte's sympathies were all for the North: "We own ourselves to be less satisfied with the lament over the *Alabama*, as we cannot but think that there was a large spice of the piratical in her exploit and for our own

part shall always be ashamed that Englishmen should have been in her." Perhaps to counterbalance this unfortunate political effusion Charlotte inserted some verses of her own, "George the Thriller; a true story of Prince Albert's ancestry."

" Why, lady dear, so sad of cheer :
 Hast waked the live-long night.
My dreams foreshow my children's woe,
 Ernst bold and Albert bright."

So runs the opening verse of this loyal ballad. Charlotte was more in her element with riddles. By a cruel chance the answer to the best of them is lost with a missing number of *The Barnacle* and no one now can guess the answer to the query, "Why is Cardinal Wiseman like a respectable goose?" Can it indeed be some outrageous pun on "propaganda" and "proper gander"?

One of the most interesting contributions to *The Barnacle* is reminiscent of Ethel's visit to Oxford in *The Daisy Chain*, being a description of Commemoration Week in 1863. The writer, who signs herself "Rowan Tree," exposes her ignorance of Oxford in the unfortunate sentence, "the choirs of Magdalene and New [sic] are considered the best." Eighty years ago the actual Commemoration ceremony or degree-giving seems to have played a much larger part in the festivities than it does today, and the College balls a much smaller one, although "Rowan Tree" attended three dances, one of them given by an undergraduate in his private rooms at Oriel, a proceeding which would cause the wildest scandal nowadays. Against these secular gaieties must be set the round of ecclesiastical excitement, evensong most days in College chapels, and on Sunday no less than three sermons. One of them, by Dr. Pusey, "lasted just an hour but did not appear at all long, being a very beautiful and intelligible one."

Beauty certainly lies in the eye of the beholder, for "Rowan Tree" describes Christ Church Library as containing "a collection of very old pictures, more valuable than beautiful; there are a great many by Titian, Guido, and Tintoretto." Having thus disposed of Oxford's best picture gallery, she goes on to describe a visit to Newman's church at Littlemore. Today, alas, Littlemore is no longer "an exquisite spot consisting of a few irregular cottages covered with roses, and the inhabitants all looking the picture of content and simplicity," but the church itself remains much as it was in 1863, a homely building, using the adjective both in its American and its English sense, where the chief impression made on the imagination of the modern visitor is one of innumerable hassocks and

hangings adorned with cross-stitch embroidery. Yet here is “Rowan Tree’s” description of what she saw that June day eighty years ago: “The marvellous beauty of the scene was beyond description; the rays of the setting sun streamed like a flood of glory into the church through the open door and gilding one object after another caused the reredos to look like a sheet of burnished gold, while the chancel windows, which are filled with very rich stained glass, reflected back on to the ground the light that shone through them with varied hues.” She moralises severely over the defection of the church’s founder. “Surely at times amidst the din of the Great City where he now lives and the gaudy splendours of churches of his own Communion he must look back with affectionate remembrances of this peaceful English home and the exquisite taste and beauty of the church in which he once ministered.”

After an evening of “lionising”—like Charlotte herself, “Rowan Tree” uses that curious phrase in the sense of “sight-seeing”—the party returned to Oxford by the river, and those who disbelieve in the athletic powers of Victorian young ladies will be surprised to hear that “E. and I each took an oar and pulled up the river all the way back to Oxford, to the infinite satisfaction of the gentlemen, who quietly sat looking on. I think on the whole,” she concludes, “this is one of the most enjoyable evenings I ever spent in my life.”

The original instigator of the Gosling Society was Charlotte’s young cousin, Mildred Coleridge. Another cousin of an older generation, Mary Frances Keble Coleridge, was numbered among Charlotte’s dearest friends. The friendship was of long standing, dating from Charlotte’s first visit to London in 1833. The two cousins were united by their admiration for John Keble, Mary’s godfather, and by their literary interests. Mary was the author of various short stories and tales for children, and as early as 1850 Charlotte writes to Marianne Dyson: “You would make Mary Coleridge write and prevent her from becoming sentimental.” A regular correspondence between Charlotte and Mary continued for many years, but all the letters which passed between the cousins have been lost, a misfortune all the more irritating because Mary was one of the few people with whom Charlotte was on terms of intimate equality. Marianne Dyson she regarded with veneration, a sentiment which she herself inspired among her friends of the younger generation, such as the Moberly daughters. Only with her contemporaries, Anne Yonge and Mary Coleridge, could she unbend on terms of easy familiarity.

Mary Coleridge is not to be confused with Christabel Coleridge, also an author and Charlotte’s future biographer, a much younger woman

who was one of the most prominent of the Goslings. Her long correspondence with Charlotte has been preserved, but the existing letters to Christabel are poor compensation for the lost ones to Mary. The correspondence dates from 1864 and early letters are concerned chiefly with the Gosling Society. Later on, when Christabel is launching out into authorship, Charlotte suggests themes for stories and criticises manuscripts sent for her approval. Her advice is always on the side of common sense rather than romance: "Could not you give your perfect hero some little weak point by which to lay hold of him and give him human interest?" And again: "Can't you give your refined young lady a sense of humour to enliven her and let her see the absurdities that the unrestrained run into?"

The sense of humour proper for a refined young lady is made abundantly clear in another letter: "One point that we did not go into in the great young lady controversy is that there are jokes *and* jokes. Refined families may be trusted to make innocent fun, but where the people are not refined there should be absolute forbidding of jokes."

Earlier letters are curiously empty of references to Charlotte's own books. There is, indeed, mention of 'The Disturbing Element,' a story "related by a spinster with a spine"—so many of Charlotte's heroines had these inconvenient spines—"who was critic to a society of nine girls (specified). There is to be an inundation in it, and I shall marry up three at the end, so I hope it will have incident enough." For the most part, however, the letters which do not deal either with the *Monthly Packet* or with the Gosling Society are concerned with the small incidents of every day, the misdoings of a publisher, histories of cats and of school-children, news of neighbours and of mutual friends. Writing to someone so much her junior it is natural that Charlotte should have little to say of great personal interest.

The year which saw the foundation of the Gosling Society saw also the birth of a little nephew at Otterbourne. Charlotte was enchanted with young William, named after his grandfather, but the baby was sadly delicate and died within a year. The death of a child never seems to have filled Charlotte's mind with obstinate questionings, and her sad and charming letter about little William contains no hint of bitterness. Perhaps the high mortality rate among Victorian children accustomed their elders to accept a child's death as an event in the ordinary course of nature, and not to regard it as an unexpected and therefore peculiarly unbearable blow of fate.

Other children soon came to fill the vacant place, and it became clear that with a growing family in the nursery new domestic arrangements

must be made. A few hundred yards up the village street and facing Charlotte's beloved church and schools stood a creeper-covered cottage called Elderfield, connected with Otterbourne House by a private path running behind the cottagers' gardens. No residence could be more suitable for Charlotte and her mother. To Elderfield, therefore, they removed themselves in 1862, and at Elderfield Charlotte remained for the rest of her long life.

CHAPTER NINE

FAMILY CHANGES AND removals were not allowed to interfere with Charlotte's activities. Some picture of her interests and occupations at this period can be gathered from one of the few series of letters to escape Miss Coleridge's destroying hand. They are written to Miss Anne Carter-Smith, one of the contributors to *The Monthly Packet*. Unfortunately Miss Smith was not a personal friend and it is doubtful whether she and Charlotte ever met, so that the letters are confined almost entirely to business and literary matters. The correspondence began as early as 1855, but the bulk of the letters date from the 'sixties.

As an editor Charlotte is a curious contrast to her modern successors. She was for ever in difficulties over the practical side of the business, and especially over the problem of payment, but as a literary critic she was all kindness and consideration, anxious never to hurt her contributors' feelings by harsh comment or abrupt refusal. If she could praise she did so without stint, often taking the trouble to write a special letter of commendation. "I cannot deny myself the pleasure of writing to tell you how much your 'Thorns and Roses' have already elicited of admiration." Such a pleasure is one which the hard-pressed editors of the twentieth century deny themselves only too easily.

Like many shy people, Charlotte could write letters full of a charming courtesy which she seldom displayed in conversation. Her praise was generous, her criticism honest but never unkind, and the trouble she was prepared to go to on other people's behalf was immense. Grammar seems to have been Miss Smith's weak point, and Charlotte even goes to the length of copying out all the chief tenses of the verbs "to lay" and "to lie" in an attempt to avoid the repetition of such horrors as "He lay down his head" and "I must lay down all my life." Miss Smith's frequent lapses were pain and grief to William Yonge's old pupil. "You must beware of 'now,' which comes very often, and I used by my home critic to be forbidden to use it at all unless I meant the real present. Take care, too, that all your sentences have a nominative and a verb or they won't parse." Poor Miss Smith! Her grammatical standards must have been low indeed.

"Thorns and Roses," "Aggesden Vicarage," and the other "sweetly pretty" stories produced by the ungrammatical Miss Smith have long ago fallen into oblivion, and Charlotte's letters have consequently lost much of their interest, but some of her criticisms are both amusing and

pointed. "Will it be disagreeable or wise," she writes, "to tell you how a dear friend of mine wrote to me? 'Aggesden Vicarage' is by far the best specimen of Miss Yonge and water." "Don't be angry," she ended, to which I answered that it was certainly not Miss Y. and water, for you were original, and yourself, but I only tell you to shew that it is desirable to squeeze out the water and leave yourself unmitigated. . . . You must take care to avoid useless greetings and comings and goings. I believe the rule is that when enough has been told to make characters distinct then only to put in such scenes as carry on the progress of events. I am very much afraid Harry and Grace are to marry and I do not like encouraging first cousins to do any such thing, but I have some hope you only mean her to be a little unsettled, which would be highly probable and improving." This horror of marriage between cousins occurs frequently in the letters. Had Charlotte herself experienced that feeling of unsettlement which ought to be so improving? "Pray keep the story well together," she concludes, "and beware of letting it draw out with needless people and scenes and repetitions of scrapes of the same kind. You see I have told you candidly exactly what crossed me, hoping I have not spoken so as to vex you, but well knowing the use to myself of being cruelly picked to pieces by my good friends."

One story is kindly but firmly refused. "I am sorry to say 'Aylton' will not do. The whole turns exclusively on love, and though that is not a subject that I at all wish to omit from the *Monthly Packet* I would rather have it as an accessory than as a principal." Having thus disposed of love, Charlotte continues with a criticism which she might well have laid to heart herself: "Are not two premature births rather too much?" Ever kind and considerate, she softens the blow of refusal by quoting approval of a collection of Miss Smith's earlier stories: "Strangers seem as if they could not help expressing how much they like them."

Occasionally Charlotte refers directly to her own methods of work. "I never could write a *short* story myself," she confesses, "and so have perhaps the more respect for the art of getting much into a small space." One letter is particularly interesting because it shows the care and trouble she took at this time with her writing: "Do you know I am very sorry to hear that you do not feel as if rewriting answered with you, for I believe it is the only way to do more than ephemeral work, for it is nearly impossible to get language, character, and keeping all right at first, and rewriting is the only way to be free of useless words and excrescences, which make a thing lengthy. Here, they tell me that reading aloud a first and second copy of mine is like going over a stony or smooth road. Remember Miss Edgeworth polishing *ad unguem* and Miss Brontë.

I believe that what reads the most easily is generally produced by the greatest amount of work. I generally go back and do over my yesterday's work, much like the snail of the arithmetical problem, who climbed four feet each day and slipped back three each night, besides sometimes going back to write whole masses over again, and get them into keeping or abridge them, but then I am happier rewriting than blocking out."

One letter must be given in full. It shows Charlotte to advantage both as a letter-writer and a critic, and it contains some entertaining reminiscences of her own youth :

"*March 31st, 1864.*

"I did not write yesterday as I had to go to Winchester, and besides my sister-in-law had not quite finished reading the MS. The part about Horace's marriage I do like, and the softening, but I am very sorry you adhere to the early part, especially his father's repeated wishes for his death. If you could only hear the horror of my mother and my sister-in-law at them ! And besides I do not see what moral you teach by giving us anything so disagreeable, the boy is as bad a boy as can be, yet without ever repenting he becomes very respectable and prosperous. I know you are not writing for children, so this matters the less, but even if for grown-up people there is no moral, for his father continues to hate him unjustly and I cannot but think it will set people against the story. . . . The lesser matters we noticed were a puzzle about the bells in the early part, also that in 1767 Charlotte could not *many* years have been in the Doctor's house. Parlourmaids are very recent matters, and the name I never heard till about twenty years ago. I am now forty, and when first I recollect, I can only think of two households without a man servant, one a mother and daughter in a cottage, the other two old sisters very poor. The Lakes would certainly have had a footman, also the surgery boy in livery, and the coachman to wait, besides friends' servants, so I do not think the maid would have appeared at all. I do not think luncheon was a regular meal, and high teas were never heard of. Indeed I think a 'noon-cheon' as even my grandmother used to call it was only a refection of bread and fruit or bread and cheese when dinner was as late as three o'clock, and that the chief meal was at two or three in all but the grandest houses keeping London hours. I don't think such a familiarity as 'Grannie' would have been dreamt of. I never saw it in any old book, and with neither of my grandmothers should any of us have attempted it, indeed my Grandmother Yonge was addressed as 'ma'am' by all her sons and daughters. Did you ever read Sir Charles Grandison ? I think it would help you to the tone of the people.

"Oh! and pray don't make the Indian muslin yellow and unfashionable, they would have been in the highest fashion just then and washing never hurts them. Did you see in Reade's last book how he makes the girl who wears one look soft and floating whereas the tarlatan ladies looked like little pigs in crackling? Josephine and Marie Antoinette both wore them and cashmires. As to the yellowness, my mother had two of the same pattern at her wedding. Only one was made up and when I came out, the two together made one which was quite a good colour, though such is the increase of garments that I suppose it would look now as if I had on a pillow-slip. I had another which an old nurse of mine who married a drum-major brought me home from India, and that never discoloured, so I really do not think they do. . . .

"I am half inclined to tell you what I so often hear said of your stories, 'Oh, I don't like her disagreeable fathers,' people are so hurt by the partiality and temper. I have mentioned this because I think a way of looking at character grows into a mannerism and that had always better be avoided. . . . I have spoken strongly, but the more I think about it the more I feel that something of alteration is wanted. I know it is possible to dilute a story down to milk and water by over criticism, and that the strong purpose of the author should have its way, but if this is your purpose you should think about it a long time first."

This letter conjures up a scene poles apart from the editorial office of today. Armchairs are drawn around the fireside at Otterbourne House or Elderfield, and Fanny Yonge busies herself with needlework whilst Frances reads aloud the latest manuscript submitted to the editor of *The Monthly Packet*. If the tale promises well it will be reserved for the honour of a criticism from the Kebles or Sir William Heathcote. So pleasantly leisured was editorship as well as everyday life in the eighteen-sixties. Charlotte is never too busy to answer Miss Smith's queries on the subject of pious books suitable for schoolboys, to enquire into the best method of running a sewing class, to discuss the proper destination of a charitable donation, or to recommend "a sort of newspaper magazine, to be safe to let schoolgirls read." "This publication," so runs the advertisement she sends Miss Smith, "is designed for a narrative of passing events of public interest, such as may be put unreservedly in the hands of young people, and convey to them information which can now only be procured amid a mixture of other subjects not always desirable to place before the eyes of the young."

Reading these letters it is sometimes difficult to realise that Charlotte was an author, and a most prolific and painstaking one. She devotes her

energy to long and careful criticism of Miss Smith's work with seldom or never a reference to her own writings. *The Heir of Redclyffe* is indeed mentioned once or twice, and there is an amusing anecdote told about *Abbeychurch*, a book which was published anonymously, telling how Charlotte and her cousin Anne went out to luncheon to be greeted with the horrified exclamation "How could you have lent us *Abbeychurch* ? Those games ! And that mother !" Only once is there any reference to the fact that Charlotte was at the time engaged in the business of writing a book herself. She excuses herself for small delays on the ground that she had visitors, or, much more rarely, that she had gone on a visit herself, never because her own work had claimed her attention. One excuse is very characteristic. "There is a village flower-show coming at which by way of example I am to show a collection of all our July wild flowers dried and named, a work which devours all my moments of spare time." The duty of encouraging village maidens in the study of botany far outweighs the necessity to finish the book on hand at the moment. For Charlotte the claims of life were always more pressing than those of literature.

Yet in spite of the imperative demands of flower-shows and the business of editing *The Monthly Packet* there was no falling off in Charlotte's output. Quietly, unobtrusively she continued to write, and in the ten years following the publication of *The Daisy Chain* no less than twenty-six books made their appearance. These included five full-length novels, two long stories for children, and reissues of *Landmarks of History* and *Conversations on the Catechism*, which had both appeared in *The Monthly Packet*. Charlotte found what relief and relaxation she required in the varied nature of the work itself, and historical research she especially enjoyed. "I believe," she writes to Miss Smith, "that to look into real life minutely is the best school for one's own mind or for fiction. If I write nothing but fiction for some time I begin to get stupid, and to feel rather as if it had been a long meal of sweets ; then history is a rest, for research or narration brings a different part of the mind into play."

Not content with the catholic variety of her subjects, Charlotte must needs deal with them all at once. She would have three manuscripts on her desk at the same time, a novel perhaps, a historical work, and a book of religious teaching, and she would write a page of each in turn, going from one to the other as she waited for the ink to dry. Blotting-paper would have been a more satisfactory if less heroic expedient, for the process was one which, as Miss Coleridge says, "could only be watched with awe."

Charlotte's first two efforts at biography date from this period. She acted in the one case as editor, in the other as translator. Miss Smith was a contributor to the first of these works, a collection of biographical sketches of heroines such as Elizabeth Fry and Hannah More, and Charlotte writes a long letter "about the ladies, whom I rather propose to call 'More Precious than Rubies.'" The virtuous ladies ultimately appeared under the much less picturesque title, *Biographies of Good Women*. The second biographical work touched on the subject of ladies who were anything but virtuous. The *Life of Marie Thérèse de Lamourous*, foundress of the House of La Miséricorde at Bordeaux, is notable as the first book Charlotte translated from the French. She proved herself to be an excellent translator and the little "Life" reads as easily as an original work.

The Stokesley Secret and *Countess Kate*, published in 1861 and 1862 respectively, are two charming stories for children, the first one fitting into the Mohun-Merrifield saga, the second dealing with characters who were to reappear later in *The Pillars of the House*. Kate Caergwent, that harum-scarum little girl with a passion for poetry and play-acting, is a recognisable portrait of Charlotte herself as a child.

Three novels published before the move to Elderfield are *Dynevor Terrace*, *The Young Stepmother*, and *Hopes and Fears*. The title of the first one was suggested by the Keble's association with Fairford, where John Keble's father was preceded as rector by Lord Dynevor, whilst Lord Ormersfield, father of the hero, takes his title from the Doomsday name of Doginersfield, home of Marianne Dyson. Charlotte herself said that Mrs. Frost, a charming old lady, was a portrait of a friend of Devonshire days, the only character that she admitted drawing from the life. The story is a plagiarism of *The Heir of Redclyffe*, with Louis Fitzjocelyn as Guy, James as Philip, and Mary Ponsonby a much less attractive Amy.

Where *Dynevor Terrace* was concerned, Sir William Heathcote took William Yonge's vacant place as home critic, querying small details and commenting on the book as a whole in a memorandum addressed to his daughter Carrie, who passed it on to Charlotte. He writes: "The characters are, I think, in general drawn with her remarkable power of giving individuality to them, and reality, even when they do odd and unaccountable things." Lord Ormersfield comes in for some acute and devastating criticism, but the women characters meet with genuine approval. "The ladies are, as is usual with Charlotte, the most interesting. Even in *Redclyffe* I prefer Amy to Guy—and in none of her other books, as far as I remember, is there any man fit to hold a candle to the women.

I am afraid that this is true in real life also—so it only makes her the better author."

The Young Stepmother is a better book than *Dynevor Terrace*, and one which the true lover of Charlotte could ill spare from the canon of her works. Who could forget the superb scene when Albinia, the young bride of the widower Edmund Kendal, goes to church for the first time in her new home and finds herself seated under a mural tablet recording the death of the first Mrs. Kendal with no less than four of her children? No wonder that Albinia felt doubts about the healthiness of the neighbourhood: "At night the fog hung white like mildew over the pond, and she could not rid herself of a spectral, haunting fancy that sickness lurked in the atmosphere." Charlotte makes the draining of that pond into a thrilling little drama.

The Young Stepmother is traditionally associated with a story as bizarre as any in the history of Victorian literature. In 1867 Tennyson and Palgrave set off on a walking-tour in Devonshire. Palgrave writes: "Our way lay right across Dartmoor, desolate and eerie even under the brightest sun, to Princetown; a village gloomy in itself from its high, wind-exposed site and more so from the great convict prison, whose inhabitants we saw working in sad files and guarded by rifles from escaping. The inn, rough and small but clean, was in accord with the surroundings. One bedroom with two huge four-posters was allotted us; and Tennyson lay in his with a candle, reading hard the book which on this trip he had taken for his novel-companion, and at every disengaged moment opened whilst rambling over the Moor. This chanced to be one of Miss Yonge's deservedly popular tales, wherein a leading element is the deferred Church Confirmation of a grown-up person. On Tennyson read, till I heard him cry with satisfaction, 'I see daylight! Mr. . . . is going to be confirmed,' after which, darkness and slumber."

But was *The Young Stepmother* really the book which Tennyson insisted on reading as he stumbled through Foxmire or strode with cloak flapping in the wind across the bleak heights of Aune Head? The Confirmation of Mr. Kendal is not an important turning-point in the story; it is a bombshell hurled at the unsuspecting reader, who has had no previous reason to believe that Mr. Kendal was not in a state of grace. In his case the rite had not been deferred but omitted. A possible alternative to *The Young Stepmother* is *The Castle-Builders*, one of Charlotte's early books, whose sub-title of *The Deferred Confirmation* accurately describes the plot of the story, but Emmeline Berners, heroine of that moral tale, hardly fills the bill as "Mr. . . ." Miss Delafield probably has the right solution: "What was Tennyson seeing daylight about? Surely

about a Confirmation that really *was* in question ; that of Harry May in *The Daisy Chain*."

Hopes and Fears, or Scenes from the Life of a Spinster, is a novel of more importance though perhaps less charm than either *Dynevor Terrace* or *The Young Stepmother*. It is difficult to realise that the first idea of the book was actually under discussion before William Yonge's death, although the previously quoted letter to Marianne Dyson proves this to be true, so entirely is *Hopes and Fears* a work of Charlotte's maturity and not of her brilliant youth. The Dorothea of the letter can have had but little in common with the Honora of the novel, a heroine who at many points resembles Charlotte herself in early middle-age.

Hopes and Fears marks a new stage in Charlotte's literary development when her interest is shifting from persons to problems. *The Daisy Chain*, typical of her earlier books, started as a fable on the subject of fame and turned into a story in which the human interest predominated over the moral lesson. Not so *Hopes and Fears*. This novel is practically a sermon on the text, "Little children, keep yourselves from idols," with which Humfrey Charlecote ended his farewell letter to Honora. "Bild"-worship, in Charlotte's own phrase, is the theme, "Bild"-worship both wise and foolish. Honora's romantic devotion to Owen Sandbrook, which blinds her to the merits of Humfrey, and her later fond and foolish love for the younger Owen, are examples of the type of hero-worship that can only lead to tragedy, whilst her late-flowering love for Humfrey, and Robert and Phoebe Fulmort's admiration for Honora herself, prove that "Bilds" can be a help as well as a hindrance.

When the story opens, Honora is a handsome, intelligent and pious young woman, who loves not wisely but too well. She conceives a great enthusiasm for Owen Sandbrook, a young clergyman who is about to go out as a missionary to the Red Indians. Unfortunately Owen forsakes both the mission and Honora to marry a wealthy wife and settle down in an English parish. Honora remains single, refusing two proposals of marriage made to her by her cousin Humfrey Charlecote, a model squire and the owner of the Holt, a country estate which Honora has always regarded as her second home. Years later she meets Owen Sandbrook once more, now a broken-hearted widower and the father of two children. Grief over the death of his wife has driven him to overwork, and for overworked parsons in Charlotte's novels there can be only one end, euphemistically called a "decline" in those days when the word "consumption" was as much taboo as "cancer" is today.

Owen dreads the prospect of leaving young Owen and Lucilla to the care of their mother's rich and worldly relations, whereupon Honora

offers to take charge of the children. She cannot bring herself to love Lucilla, a remarkably pretty and badly brought up little girl, whose whole heart has been concentrated on her father, but Owen the younger she worships, and Humfrey has to remind her that "there are ways of loving without setting one's heart." He himself has loved Honora faithfully in just such a way for many years, and now at last she learns to return his love. But it is too late; Humfrey is suffering from an incurable disease (the medical details are as puzzling as they invariably are with Charlotte's invalids) and marriage is apparently out of the question. "He was too unselfish to think of exposing her to the shock of making her a widow." At his death he leaves the Holt to her, a legacy which she regards as a sacred trust, setting herself to keep everything there as Humfrey, her true "Bild," would have wished.

Meanwhile the children are growing up and poor Honora's satisfaction in them is much diminished. Lucilla turns out a heartless flirt, disregarding Honora entirely and spending her time with the Charterises, her fashionable and wealthy cousins. She is courted by Robert Fulmort, the serious and humourless son of a gin-distiller. Robert plans to abjure his father's godless business and take Holy Orders. Lucilla loves him, but she will not admit the fact; instead, she plays with him, and plans a fishing expedition to Ireland with her cousin Horatia, a lady who would have passed even the strict qualification for a chaperon required some years ago by the University of Oxford, being indeed unmarried but well over the age of twenty-five. Robert begs Lucilla to forgo this ultimate challenge to decorum, but she persists, whereupon he devotes his not inconsiderable fortune to building a church and a clergyhouse inhabited by a body of celibate priests. There he immures himself safe from the temptations of love.

Lucilla very properly has a horrible time in Ireland, where some of the minor horrors are reminiscences of Charlotte's expedition to Glendalough—"That lake whose gloomy tea China's shores did never see"—a place which seems to have impressed her as more barbaric than beautiful. When Lucilla returns she finds her lover lost to her, a young woman who goes off to Ireland alone with a female cousin being clearly no suitable wife for a parson. Charlotte makes plain that the lack of chaperonage was the stumbling-block, and not Lucilla's poaching propclivities, to which she manages to turn a strangely blind eye. Owen is quite light-hearted about his sister's exploits in that direction: "They vow they will fish all the best streams, and do more than any crack fisherman going, and they would like to see who would venture to warn them off. They've tried that already. Last summer what did Lucy

do, but go and fish Sir Harry Buller's water. You know he's a very tiger about preserving. Well, she fished coolly in the face of all his keepers ; they stood aghast." The modern reader stands aghast too, viewing this topsy-turvy world where prospective parsons' wives might poach without eliciting anything but mild disapproval provided that they poached properly chaperoned.

As if Lucilla's misbehaviour were not enough to break poor Honora's heart, Owen must needs run into debt, contract a secret marriage with a village school-teacher, and desert his dying wife and his son. Worst of all, of course, he loses his faith. Robert Fulmort's sister Phoebe, an unbelievably virtuous girl, attaches herself to Honora, coming in time to fill in some measure the place left vacant by the erring Lucilla and Owen, and the second part of the book is almost entirely concerned with her affairs, her trials at the hands of a most unsavoury collection of sisters, the best of whom is an imbecile, and her relations with Miss Fennimore, an intellectual, upright agnostic of a governess. Phoebe is beloved by Owen, but she marries another Humfrey Charlecote, the long-lost heir to the Holt, who thus deprives Owen both of his bride and of his inheritance. However, Owen has by this time learnt the folly of his ways, and returned happily to the true fold, whilst Lucilla, also penitent, but suffering, of course, from consumption, is safely married off to an elderly and eccentric curate.

From this brief summary it will be seen that the story is not a little involved. Chapter after chapter is devoted to the Fulmorts, who are in reality only subsidiary characters, whilst Honora, the real heroine, is allowed to sink into the background. In March 1864, Charlotte wrote to Miss Smith : "About plots, don't you know how one photographer can so place himself as to make the real objects group themselves into a picture ? I think the point is to find the point of view in which events might thus group themselves." In her new novel Charlotte herself had made the fatal mistake of shifting her point of view.

"Get hold of sentences by their right ends," is another piece of advice from the same letter, yet even Miss Smith can hardly have written a worse sentence than Charlotte's own, "the having been plunged into a new atmosphere was good for Phoebe." *Hopes and Fears* is full of sentences got hold of by the wrong end. In her early days Charlotte was a clear and a careful writer, and if her style was not distinguished at least it was a workmanlike instrument well adapted to her purpose. *Hopes and Fears* marks the beginning of a decline, and from now onwards lapses are to be more and more frequent.

Yet, in spite of involved plot and slipshod writing, *Hopes and Fears*

is one of the most interesting of Charlotte's books, because in it for the first time she touches on the twin problems of progress and the eternal friction between young and old. In 1860 Charlotte was thirty-seven, and thirty-seven was middle-age in the Victorian era, although, like Honora, she felt herself to be "in the pride of her womanhood" rather than on the shelf. In her own youth she had been so dutiful a daughter that the relationship between young and old had presented no problems, but now it was otherwise. The new generation, like all new generations, was essentially undutiful. With a generosity of spirit remarkable in one so circumscribed in outlook Charlotte set herself to understand the point of view of these puzzling young things. *Hopes and Fears* is the study of a middle-aged woman's reaction to the next generation, but Charlotte herself transcends Honora. She does not like Lucilla, but she makes it clear that the fault is not all on one side, and she can even smile gently at Honora's unscientific enthusiasms. "She has so much figurative and dreamy sentiment that one never gets to the firm, clear surface. With her I always have an impression of fluffiness." In the end poor Lucilla exclaims in despair, "I cannot like mutton with the wool on."

Charlotte herself had little use for wool, but she had less for what she considered to be the hardness of "the modern girl." Lucilla is a little like Gertrude May as that young lady is to reappear in *The Pillars of the House*. Gertrude is neither a flirt nor a fashionable beauty, but both she and Lucilla are essentially unsentimental; they discuss, they analyse, in a word, they de-bunk. The conventional position is reversed; and age is full of zeal whilst youth is disillusioned.

"Crabbed age and Youth
Cannot live together
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Youth is hot and bold,
Age is weak and cold."

But what if the coldness be on the side of youth? Lack of enthusiasm was a state of mind that Charlotte could not comprehend: "I don't think you or I," she said to Miss Anderson Morshead, one of her Goslings, "are much troubled by the sin of Accidie." So, although Charlotte does her best to appreciate Lucilla's point of view, she cannot feel warmly towards her, and a character that is neither warmly loved nor warmly hated by its creator is a character that fails to convince. Justice is a poor substitute for emotion.

Yet although she might not understand the young exponents of progress Charlotte was a great believer in progress itself. She was an

example of that typically English paradox, a progressive conservative, demanding not changelessness but continuity. There was nothing static about her outlook, but she insisted that the present must grow out of the past. The heir must be in the correct line of succession so that although kings may alter the dynasty remains unchanged. At the end of *Hopes and Fears* Humfrey Charlecote the second makes various changes at the Holt, and Honora, though her soul is sore within her, recognises the necessity and acquiesces, "confident that even if he should set up an engine it would only be if the first Humfrey would have done so in his place."

This preoccupation with the problem of progress was to mark all the later books, whose plots frequently turned on the inevitable clash between the old and the new, and in spite of faults and confusion *Hopes and Fears* remains the most important novel of Charlotte's maturity. The book was published two years before the move from the home of her childhood, but both in subject and in atmosphere it is typical of the difference between the youthful Charlotte of Otterbourne House and the mature Miss Yonge of Elderfield.

CHAPTER TEN

ONCE ESTABLISHED AT Elderfield, Charlotte continued the daily round almost unchanged from the routine of Otterbourne House. But death and change were inevitable with the passage of the years, and the first to go were the Kebles. John Keble's sister Elisabeth, who had been one of the family at Hursley Parsonage, had died two years before the move to Elderfield. She was a curiously attractive person possessing that power over animals that sometimes marks particularly quiet and silent people. One day when she was sitting on the lawn a wren pecked at the pattern of small berries on her dress and, disappointed in its hope of something good to eat, made its way underneath the muslin flounce and attacked the tantalising berries from within. People as well as birds felt the fascination of her quiet spirit, and her death left an irreparable gap in that close circle of friends, soon to be shattered by other blows.

In 1862 Mrs. Keble fell so ill that she was ordered to winter in a warm climate. Penzance was the chosen place and Charlotte watched the departure with a heavy heart. She knew that there could be no hope of final recovery for the old friend who had been a second mother to her, and she felt a sick foreboding as she noticed Mr. Keble's bowed shoulders and anxious face. The years of man are three score and ten, and he had passed his seventieth birthday that very year. But repining was alien to John Keble's own spirit, and after waving goodbye to the travellers Charlotte turned homewards to a busy winter of work on her two new books. One of them was that monumental work, *A History of Christian Names*, a book which must have cost its author many hours of patient research. But work on it was a labour of love; Charlotte found the study of names a fascinating hobby and historical research a pleasant change after the writing of fiction.

The fiction in hand this winter of 1862-1863 was *The Trial*, a sequel to *The Daisy Chain*. This book has been unjustly neglected because it does not attain to the high standard set by its predecessor, but judged on its own merits it is an interesting and in places a clever piece of work. Young Leonard Ward, son to Dr. May's old partner, is unjustly accused of murder and sentenced to death, but at the last minute the sentence is commuted to one of penal servitude. All the May family are devoted to the young man, who cherishes a romantic adoration for Ethel, ten years his senior, and they are convinced that the real murderer is Sam Axworthy, Norman's old opponent at Stoneborough School. Tom

May, now a brilliant young doctor, at last succeeds in proving Axworthy's guilt, and Leonard, set free after several years' imprisonment, devotes his life to missionary work in the South Seas.

The Trial must be one of the earliest examples in English literature of a murder mystery novel, antedating Le Fanu's *Uncle Silas* by a year. The mystery itself is very simple, and Charlotte gives no promise of possible development into a writer of detective fiction. She does, however, display in *The Trial* a deep and almost subtle psychological insight most unusual with her. The return of Leonard from prison is one of the best things Charlotte ever wrote, and it is tempting to wonder what experience gave her such insight into the young man's troubled mind. His lack of joy at his deliverance, his horrible delusion that he was after all guilty of the crime for which he had suffered such punishment, above all, his utter passivity, all ring painfully true: "he seemed to have neither the will nor impulse to speak, move or act, though whatever was desired of him, he did with the implicit obedience that no one could bear to see." Even after he has recovered health and spirits he feels that, innocent as he is, the taint of prison must always rest upon him and he hesitates to offer himself for a missionary, in the end agreeing to go only in the most menial capacity. It would be expected that Charlotte in her ignorance of crime and criminals would make his return a joyous affair; instead she makes it clear that although Leonard's soul is unharmed by his bitter trial his spirits are all but shattered and that he will suffer for life from the effects of his prison experience.

Another brilliant piece of psychology is the sketch of the relationship between Dr. May and his son Tom, a relationship compacted of mutual respect and mutual misunderstanding. Dr. May is all chivalrous enthusiasm, Tom all science and disillusionment. Yet it is Tom who devotes himself to the apparently impossible task of establishing Leonard's innocence, Tom who sacrifices his career for the sake of the father whom he found so uncongenial, Tom who in the end commits the supremely romantic folly of marrying Leonard's sister Averil, believed to be dying of consumption. It seems as if Charlotte, having killed off Margaret in the previous book, felt the May family to be incomplete without a permanent invalid, for she rescues Averil from the grave only to condemn her to "a sofa life." For a physician and the father of eleven children dear Dr. May seems to have known curiously little about either matrimony or tubercular germs, since he is made to declare, "After all, I have liked none of our weddings better."

The delicate Mrs. Keble, loved faithfully by her devoted husband, may have furnished Charlotte with a pattern for the invalid wives who

abound in her novels. With the spring the Kebles came back again to Hursley, both of them apparently in renewed health and spirits, but it was respite rather than recovery, and by the next year Mrs. Keble was visibly sinking. This year, 1864, saw the publication of *The Clever Woman of the Family*, another one of Charlotte's novels in which an invalid figures prominently. Ermine is one of the most tiresome of Charlotte's heroines, and in the end the reader is left pitying her husband, Colonel Keith, for reasons other than his wife's physical deformity. At the climax of the story the villain is brought before the magistrates and committed for trial at the next assizes. Determined to make no mistake on points of law, Charlotte sought the advice of Sir William Heathcote, who wrote a memorandum giving his opinion, confirmed by that of Mr. Justice Coleridge, on such questions as the length of time that the accused could be kept in prison before his trial, the date and place of the assizes, and the cross-examination of witnesses.

In the winter of 1864 John Keble was suddenly laid low by a paralytic stroke, and anxiety for both her friends hung heavily on Charlotte. He recovered sufficiently for the last year to be a peaceful and happy one, spent together by husband and wife "as a sort of honeymoon," but in the spring of 1865 a second stroke attacked him as he watched by her death-bed and he died himself on March 29th. A week later she followed him to the grave.

On a bright spring day, when "the celandines glistened like stars," Charlotte went over to Hursley to attend John Keble's funeral, following the familiar windings of King's Lane, the road which had seen a thousand journeyings by Yonges and Kebles between Hursley and Otterbourne. Its name commemorates the local tradition that William Rufus's body was brought this way from the New Forest. Even today, tarred and macadamised as it is and edged with new houses and bungalows for the first half-mile, it still retains the character of a country lane, winding between hayfields where the hedgerows are bright with dog-roses and campion. Westwards the land slopes steeply, a heath country half wooded, half heather-clad, in sharp contrast to the pastoral meadows and corn-fields lying to the east. Nothing has changed since Charlotte walked this way to Hursley, a good six miles there and back, no mean achievement for one who, although reputed a good walker in her youth, later earned the reputation of disliking exercise.

Everything was peaceful on that day when Charlotte walked along King's Lane on her way to see her dear "Bild" and master laid in his grave. His work finished, he had died full of years and honour, and it was with quiet sorrow that Charlotte paid her last visit to John Keble.

The break-up of the Otterbourne, Hursley, Winchester circle of friends was completed by the retirement of Dr. Moberly and his acceptance of the living of Brightstone, in the Isle of Wight. Thither Charlotte and her mother went on a visit in September 1867, just at the time of the Harvest Festival, where Charlotte was an object of great interest to the church workers as she helped with the decorations "with her dress tucked up, sweeping out the chancel with a long-handled broom." From Brightstone they went on to Torquay to enjoy that most delicious of all pleasures to Charlotte, the opening of a new church.

Happy as these visits were, life was clouded by fresh anxiety, for Fanny Yonge was visibly ageing. Although Charlotte could not or would not recognise the first symptoms of serious disease, by 1868 all hope of recovery was gone. One more golden moment Charlotte had when she went to Oxford for the laying of the foundation-stone of Keble College. At a meeting after the ceremony Bishop Selwyn mentioned her by name, speaking of *The Daisy Chain* and the ship she had given to the Melanesian Mission out of the proceeds of *The Heir of Redclyffe*, whereat the Moberly contingent present reported that "she was quite unable to keep in a broad smile of happiness."

Happiness was not to come her way again for many a long day. Little by little Fanny Yonge was losing the use of her faculties, until at last she could not even speak intelligibly, but she retained enough of her senses to recognise her immediate family and to demand her daughter's presence at all hours. To watch this long-drawn-out decay was agony to Charlotte; she hated sick-nursing and shrank in horror from the sight of illness. Acutely, almost morbidly sensitive herself, when faced with either physical or mental suffering her first instinct was for flight, and six months' constant attendance on an imbecile invalid must have tried her powers of endurance to the utmost. She was helped by the kindness of her brother and her sister-in-law, with whom she had at last established a genuinely affectionate relationship—"I am comforted to have won her love these last years." Death came in the end as a relief, but Charlotte was filled with a sense of desolation. "I know," she writes to Miss Smith, "you too know how close one clings to the last surviving parent and the sense of being still a child at home."

The position of a grown-up "child at home" has its peculiar trials, and Charlotte's understanding of these difficulties is shown in a letter written some years after Mrs. Yonge's death. Christabel Coleridge, also a home daughter, wrote to ask advice about the inevitable irritation and friction that must arise even in the most devoted households. The reply

is interesting for the light it throws upon Charlotte's own character and upon her relationship with her family :

“ Such a letter as yours is hard to answer usefully, though as far as sympathy goes I know it exactly, how distressing and humiliating it is to feel one's creatures go so far beyond one in goodness that they only condemn one to oneself, while other people take them for tokens of one's own goodness ! And then the being religious intellectually rather than spiritually and the way in which unhappiness aggravates one's temper, and one behaves worse to those to whom it would seem most impossible, I know it all, and I am afraid it is all in me still, though the opportunities for struggling and shewing temper are, alas, ended. But then comes the real question, practically what to do, and before I go on to the further one let me tell you what I do think did help me, and was Mr. Keble's advice. I used always to object to whatever anyone proposed, and he advised me to keep an account, by a pinprick on a piece of paper, of every time I did it. I do think it helped to mend that one fault.

“ But most likely you have tried this almost mechanical mode before, and you may have found that the very distressing yourself about one's temper makes it worse, by increasing the general fuss.

“ I think to lay it before someone experienced might be a help, and might shew you some means of calming yourself. For that is, I should gather, what you most want, and those kind, wise talks and prayers do help one very much by their influence spreading long afterwards.”

Whatever literary airs and graces Charlotte possessed always forsook her when she sat down to letter-writing, but, badly expressed though it may be, this letter gives a peculiarly vivid glimpse of the writer, her quick temper, her genuine humility, her intellectual and essentially practical form of religion. There could be no more revealing picture of Charlotte than this vision of her dutifully pricking a hole to record some small outburst of her much-tried temper.

With the death of Mrs. Yonge those trials of temper were over and the usefulness of that pin-pricked record ended, but to Charlotte “ opportunities for struggling and shewing temper” were far preferable to loneliness. However, though she often accused herself of physical cowardice, moral courage Charlotte never lacked, and she set herself firmly to face the emptiness of Elderfield, refusing all offers of permanent companionship. “ I am not afraid of solitary days ; after all, it is all well.” Fifteen years ago Anne Yonge had been her comforter after her father's death, and now once again this well-loved cousin came on a visit to help her settle down to her solitary life.

Rumour has it that after her mother's death Charlotte contemplated

joining a Sisterhood. Her connection with the Sisterhood at Wantage was a close one through her friendship with the Butlers, with whom she often stayed, on one memorable occasion driving over to see the Fairford windows, "eighteen miles with the brisk, black pony." It was natural that in her loneliness her thoughts should turn to what she described in later years as "the wonderful 'go' there was at Wantage." Dean Butler and Julian Yonge are said to have discouraged the idea that she should become a nun, arguing that she could do much better work in the world than out of it. However this may be, the fact that a month or two after her mother's death Charlotte became an Associate of Wantage suggests that religious orders and their ideals were very much in her mind at this time, so that she may well have considered whether she herself was or was not suited for such a life.

The next year, however, found Charlotte not immured in a convent but embarked on her first and only trip abroad. Julian, Frances, Charlotte and her faithful maid Harriet Spratt left England at the beginning of August 1869 on a visit to Monsieur Guizot, then living in retirement at Val Richer in Normandy. Louis Philippe's minister might seem a strange friend for an English authoress, whose connection with politics was of the slightest, but the acquaintanceship had arisen through the statesman's daughter, Madame Guizot de Witt, who was anxious to translate some of Charlotte's works into French. Later Charlotte was to return the compliment by translating several of Madame de Witt's books into English.

The Yonges travelled through Rouen to Lisieux, soon to be made famous by a young woman whose piety was in startling contrast to the sober-sided religion of Otterbourne and Hursley. It would be hard to find two characters more diametrically opposed to each other than Charlotte Yonge and the Little Flower. From Lisieux the party drove to Val Richer, and in that strenuous, cheerful household, presided over by Madame de Witt, Charlotte felt herself surprisingly quickly at home, in spite of "a regular French bedroom, like a little drawing-room," and the odd food eaten at unaccustomed hours. Her hosts appeared to be interested in all Charlotte's special enthusiasms; they took her to inspect schools, they brought out portfolios of Ary Scheffer's pictures for her entertainment, and they even organised an expedition in search of fossils, her latest hobby. The Guizots were an intellectual, religiously minded and highly respectable family, in fact, a French replica of the Yonges themselves. All this, however, would have gone for nothing had they not been Protestants, and devout Protestants at that, who held family prayers every day and Sunday services conducted in Madame de

Witt's boudoir. For all her High Church principles and her dislike of Nonconformity, Charlotte could never have felt at her ease in a Papistical household.

From Val Richer the party went on to Paris, but unfortunately no letters survive to record Charlotte's reactions and experiences there. The distance between Otterbourne and the Paris of the Second Empire was great indeed. Charlotte set out on the homeward journey refreshed both in body and mind; fresh surroundings had acted like a tonic, driving away the depression induced by the sorrows of the last few years. But the news that greeted her on her arrival in England shattered her freshly won happiness; Anne Yonge, most beloved of all the cousins, had died suddenly after only two days' illness. Anne it was who had stood by Charlotte through all her previous sorrows, but now Anne herself was dead and there was no one to fill her place as comforter. Remembering childhood days at Puslinch and the bluebells of Kirley Point, Charlotte grieved bitterly for that dear Anne who had been for so long nearer to her than any sister. "I feel as if I were living my own life instead of that of my people, and being the old original Charlotte instead of Miss Yonge." So she had written long ago after a visit to Puslinch. Now, with both parents dead, her happy second home at Hursley broken up, and even Puslinch a house of mourning, for her there was no place where she could be once again the old Charlotte of the eager laugh and ungovernable enthusiasms, an affectionate, clinging creature dependent upon those around her for encouragement, advice, support. That Charlotte was gone for ever, and in her place a lonely woman wandered through the emptiness of Elderfield, a middle-aged woman called Miss Yonge.

Two resources she had, however, that never failed her; the one was her religion, the other her writing. All through these troubled years Charlotte was working hard, most of her time being devoted to history or historical romance. Perhaps the clouds of sorrow that darkened her own life made her turn to the distant past as an escape from the present. *The Prince and the Page* was published in 1865, *The Dove in the Eagle's Nest* in 1866, *The Chaplet of Pearls* in 1867, and *The Caged Lion* in 1870. These last three books, together with the earlier *The Little Duke* and *Unknown to History* which appears in 1882, are the best-known of Charlotte's historical tales.

Unlike the novels of contemporary life, the historical books are not immediately attractive to the modern reader who has not learnt to love them as a child. A mixture of piety and historical research, served up in the language of Wardour Street, does not make appetising fare for

twentieth-century palates, whilst the serious historian must often stand amazed at the reading of history presented by these stories. Charlotte's accuracy in small matters was only equalled by her incomprehension of large issues. "All historical romance," she writes in the preface to *The Chaplet of Pearls*, "is the shaping of the conceptions that the imagination must necessarily form when dwelling upon the records of history." The conceptions formed by Charlotte's own imagination were painted in the most decorous Tractarian hues; Henry V, as she saw him, would have raised no tremor in the drawing-room of Hursley Parsonage, and her German maidens of the fifteenth century would have passed without remark in Otterbourne Sunday School. Not merely did she project her own Victorian and Church of England philosophy of life into mediaeval Germany or Renaissance France, but she had no idea that any other philosophy had ever existed. The standards of Ulm in 1472 are identical with those of Hursley five hundred years later. To use the convenient terms of the Schoolmen, Charlotte can paint the accidents of the historical scene vividly enough, but the substance for ever eludes her because she cannot comprehend any way of life that is fundamentally different from her own.

The Caged Lion is a typical example of this combination of great historical accuracy with complete lack of historical understanding. Every detail of the setting is correct, every statement verified. Visiting occasionally in the neighbourhood of Thirsk and Tanfield, Charlotte must have had opportunity to check the accuracy of her Yorkshire scenes, but she could have had no such first-hand knowledge about the antiquities of Scotland and the ancient see of Durham. Such, however, is her passion for exactitude that when she describes Lilius as unable to pass beyond the nave of the church at Coldingham she must needs add that this discrimination against women had not always existed, the monastery being originally a double foundation containing both monks and nuns. This piece of information is completely true; it is also completely irrelevant.

All this Pre-Raphaelite painting of detail is no substitute for a sense of period, and such a sense Charlotte sadly lacked. This deficiency may be due to her devotion to Scott and Shakespeare, two masters who stride with complete disregard across the barriers of the centuries. But genius is a dangerous guide, and whereas Scott's characters are common humanity dressed up in the costumes of the past whilst Shakespeare's tremendous figures disdain even those trappings, poor Charlotte's are puppets set up against a background that for all its period features retains for ever the atmosphere of Otterbourne.

Her interpretation of historical events is determinedly Shakespearian.

In *The Caged Lion* Henry V is presented as a knight in shining armour, and her reading of his relations with the captive King James of Scotland would astonish a modern historian. Her determined dislike of both Popery and extreme Protestantism is another stumbling-block ; she is apt to discover the “*Via Media*” in many unlikely places where it cannot be discerned except by the eye of faith, and the vision often distorts her historical judgment. In *The Chaplet of Pearls* she makes young Berenger, bred up in the England of the second half of the sixteenth century, find himself more at home at the Mass than in a Huguenot conventicle, a supposition which is, to say the least, unlikely to be true at so late a date. It is a pity that Charlotte never contemplated a story about Little Gidding or George Herbert ; dealing with the early years of the reign of Charles I she would have found herself at home.

For some obscure reason the most popular of the historical tales has always been *The Dove in the Eagle's Nest*. To the unregenerate the chief pleasure afforded by this ingenuous story is the arrival of the least-expected of all Charlotte's infants. Christina, the heroine, is secretly married to the young baron Eberhard. Knowing Charlotte's peculiar views about matrimony, there is wicked delight in trying to discover whether the unfortunate bride was indeed left at the church door. But no ! Christina swoons away on hearing of Eberhard's death in a foray, and on returning to herself she is greeted with the news that “he spent his last breath in owning you for his lady and in bidding us cherish you and the young baron that is to be.” Even better is in store ; Christina duly produces not one young baron but two. In moments of crisis Charlotte is always lavish with twins.

The historical tales were enormously popular with the contemporary public, whatever may be the judgment of posterity upon them, but in spite of their success the end of the 'sixties marks a decline in the quality of Charlotte's output, though unfortunately not in the quantity. Now that William Yonge and John Keble were no longer there to correct and advise, the value of these home critics became at once apparent. Keble's advice had not always been received in the docile spirit that might be imagined. Writing shortly after Charlotte's death Miss Fanny Patteson says : “I am almost amused at the expression of 'Master' with regard to Mr. Keble in so many of the (obituary) notices when I remember the dear man's reply to my query—‘Why don't you keep Charlotte in check and not let her write so much?’—was 'My dear, I can't.'” However, when the Kebles were at Hursley and the Moberlys at Winchester Charlotte was always in close touch with minds more powerful than her own, able to sharpen her wits and her understanding against some of the

best brains of the day. Contact with a world outside the charmed circle of the Oxford Movement she never achieved, but that circle included some of the finest scholars and the most famous literary men of their generation. Contemporaries put Keble, Isaac Williams, and Faber on a poetic pedestal of giddy altitude, and a critic as able as Bishop Westcott could write, "Keble—Wordsworth—Goethe—is not the first the *true* poet?" Though the twentieth century may smile, the nineteenth envied Charlotte for living in a society no less famous for its literary achievements than for its religious activities.

Now all this was changed. The year 1869, which saw the appointment of Dr. Moberly to the bishopric of Salisbury, did indeed bring the Moberlys back within reach of Otterbourne, but visits to Salisbury were no real substitute for the constant intercourse of College Street or Fieldhouse Farm. Charlotte was out of touch with the rising generation of writers, her shyness and her rigid religious outlook combining to keep her almost entirely secluded from contemporary literary society. Among her surviving friends and the younger generation of her admirers where Charlotte reigned as undisputed queen there was no one of sufficient authority to criticise or to tell her that she was writing too many books and writing them too fast. But before her powers declined to the level of the later novels Charlotte was to enjoy a brief but golden Indian summer of achievement. In 1873 this late-flowering of her talents produced two books which rank among her best. One of them, *The Pillars of the House*, still numbers its admirers by the thousand, the other is today unread and forgotten, yet Charlotte never produced a more genuine piece of literary craftsmanship than her biography of the martyred Bishop Patteson.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

JOHN COLERIDGE PATTESON was the son of Sir John Patteson of Feniton, a High Court Judge of some distinction. "Coley" was an attractive and intelligent boy, but although possessed of abilities far above the average he never achieved the success expected of him either at Eton or at Oxford. Like many another brilliant young man, he was interested in too great a variety of subjects to allow himself to become immersed in pure scholarship; cricket, tennis, history, theology, music and art all engrossed his attention, but his real love was for the study of languages. Before he was twenty-five he had made himself a master of Italian, Hebrew and Arabic as well as the conventional Greek and Latin, French and German. In 1853 he was ordained and worked for some time in Alfington, a village near his own home, but his heart had always been drawn towards foreign missions and a visit from Bishop Selwyn decided him to become a missionary. On March 28th, 1855, he set sail for the Antipodes, never to see England again.

After working in New Zealand and in the islands of the Pacific, Patteson was consecrated Bishop of Melanesia in 1861. His linguistic facility was most useful in a diocese where variations of speech and dialect were innumerable, and his selfless devotion made him much beloved by the islanders, but even his reputation was not sufficient protection in places where European traders had exasperated native feeling by the practice of kidnapping men to work in the plantations in Fiji. Missionary work grew more and more dangerous, but the Bishop persisted until in 1871 he was murdered by the inhabitants of Nukapu in unthinking revenge for the kidnapping of five men by some unscrupulous trader.

The story of Coleridge Patteson was one to appeal immediately to Charlotte both because of its missionary interest and because of its connection with her own family, Yonges and Pattesons being distant cousins. When the Bishop's sisters, Joanna and Fanny, asked her to undertake the writing of a biography she did so in the most solemn spirit—"it is embalming the saint for the Church"—but her professional pleasure as an author soon got the better of this chilly reverence. She thoroughly enjoyed her work on so congenial a subject and she ended by becoming quite light-hearted over her task. The Moberlys told how she came in to lunch after a morning spent in her usual manner writing two books at once, and exclaimed, "I have had a dreadful day, I have

killed both the Bishop and Felix," Felix being the hero of *The Pillars of the House*. Such flippancy is not the spirit in which anyone would expect Charlotte to go about the business of embalming a saint.

Many friends of Bishop Patteson protested against the choice of Charlotte as biographer, arguing that the writing of such a book demanded, to use her own words, "that full and sympathetic masculine grasp of a man's powerful mind, which is necessarily denied to me." But Joanna and Fanny Patteson stood firm, and thereby showed their wisdom. "Coley" could have had no better biographer, masculine or feminine. Charlotte possessed in abundance that first and essential qualification, enthusiasm for her subject. She had about her nothing of that dutiful and apologetic air with which even the most devout Christians are apt to refer to foreign missions. To her mission work was the greatest inspiration life had to offer; it was the quest of the Grail, excitement, adventure, romance. If anyone had made bold to tell her that many people, even many members of the Church of England, find missionary meetings a not very enlivening form of entertainment, she would have stared at them with uncomprehending eyes. The conversion of the heathen was not merely a duty; it was a privilege and a pleasure, and she enjoyed every moment that she was able to devote towards the furtherance of this exciting end.

Charlotte wrote of "Coley" with as much enthusiasm as if she had been recording the life of her other favourite hero, the Duke of Wellington, and she made of the Bishop a figure almost as inspiring and exciting as that great man himself. Most biographies of missionaries are written by other missionaries and are therefore suspect to the general reader, but if the initial prejudice can be overcome they will be found to contain a great store of interest and excitement.

" If I were a cassowary
On the plains of Timbuctoo
I'd eat up a missionary
And his hat and hymn-book too."

A Jesuit father tortured by Red Indians can be a romantic figure, not so a Victorian clergyman devoured by cannibals or cassowaries. This conventional picture of a nineteenth-century missionary is far from inspiring; it is also very far from the truth. Like Bishop Steer of Zanzibar and many another missionary bishop of the period, Coleridge Patteson was a great scholar and a great gentleman, who turned his scholarship to account in the systematic study of hitherto unknown languages and used his breadth of judgment to further the development,

both physical and spiritual, of the primitive people among whom he worked. There was about him nothing narrow, nothing canting, nothing underbred.

Charlotte herself wrote that the chief difficulties in her way were "my own very slight personal acquaintance with the externals of the man, and my ignorance of the scenes in which the chief part of his life were passed." The setting of his early life was familiar ground to her, for although she had met "Coley" himself but twice she stayed frequently at his pleasant family home of Feniton Court, and his friends and relations formed an integral part of her own circle. His early years at school, first at Ottery and then at Eton, must have recalled to her the history of her own father, making themselves dear and comprehensible through the association. And, although she may have been ignorant of the external scenes of his later life, no one was more familiar than she with the spirit in which he lived and worked. For years they had been in regular correspondence, and shortly before his death he wrote to Dr. Moberly: "Your letters, together with those of Edwin Palmer, Miss Yonge, or someone of the few, very few like-minded friends, are the only ones on which I can rely for sound, useful criticism of things and persons."

Charlotte Yonge and Coleridge Patteson started from the same beginnings. When he sailed for New Zealand "Coley" was a typical son of the Oxford Movement, holding firmly to all its shibboleths as well as to the conventions of his class and upbringing. However, he soon identified himself with his new surroundings, and a mind attuned to life among Melanesian natives and New Zealand colonists was bound to follow lines of thought different from those current in Oxford common-rooms and country vicarages. As time went on he ventured to disagree, respectfully but firmly, with points of doctrine put forward by Keble himself, and he was even willing to compromise with that ark of the Victorian covenant, Sunday observance. "I hope the Melanesian Christians may learn to keep holy the Lord's Day. But am I to begin my teaching of a wild Solomon Islander at that end, when he has not learnt the evil of breaking habitually the sixth, seventh, and eighth commandments?" Had Charlotte, like Meta of *The Daisy Chain*, found her missionary and followed him to the Antipodes, she would have seen Anglican Christianity flourishing there as a wild tropical flower in startling contrast to the tidy garden blooms of Hursley. It speaks volumes both for her honesty and for her skill as a biographer that she allows these differences of outlook to appear and that she does not attempt to force her hero's opinions and utterances into what she would consider the

suitable episcopal mould. The book gives a picture of a developing mind and character, developing indeed in real sympathy with friends and fellow-workers at home in England, but diverging at times from some of their most tenaciously held convictions.

Charlotte recognised that these differences of opinion were due to Bishop Patteson's burning desire to see his people develop into Melanesian and not English Christians. "The heathen man is not treated fairly if we encumber our message with unnecessary requirements. We seek to denationalise these races, as far as I can see; whereas we ought surely to change as little as possible—only what is clearly incompatible with the simplest form of Christian teaching and practice. I don't mean that we are to compromise with truth, but to study the native character and not present the truth in an unnecessarily unattractive form." Nothing could be farther from the accepted view of a nineteenth-century missionary as a narrow-minded cleric trying to force English religion upon the gentle savage, together with English clothes, English habits, and English idiosyncrasies.

The *Life of Bishop Patteson* has long been out of print and, for all its virtues, the book would probably not repay the reprinting. Both its subject and its length tell against it today; few are the modern readers who are prepared to grapple with two stout volumes dealing with a missionary bishop dead seventy years ago. But the same reasons cannot explain the mysterious fact that of recent years no enterprising publisher has troubled to reprint *The Pillars of the House*, the second near-masterpiece published by Charlotte in the course of the year 1873. Its length should be no deterrent, for all her true lovers, regarding *The Pillars* as the quintessence of Charlottery, only regret that its many volumes were not still more numerous. Today this treasure has to be unearthed from forgotten schoolroom shelves or second-hand junk stalls, almost certainly with the covers gone and sometimes—oh, bitter disappointment!—with a volume missing. Of late years any astute bookseller lucky enough to come across a complete copy in tolerable condition puts it in the most conspicuous place in his window and prices it accordingly. Even before the outbreak of war drove harassed minds to seek relaxation in company with Charlotte *The Pillars* was always comparatively costly, and now when sixpenny trays are innocent even of those horrid little red editions of *The Trial* and *The Lances of Lynwood*, its fat volumes have soared to a prohibitive value.

Just because *The Pillars of the House* is not so good a book as *The Daisy Chain* it is a book more typical of Charlotte. In *The Daisy Chain* she surpasses herself, but in *The Pillars of the House* she is her own natural

self, neither more nor less. She does not rise beyond her limitations as she rose in creating the character of Dr. May, but neither does she sink beneath her own normal level. The Mays are built of the stuff of common humanity as we know it in every age and place; the Underwoods, the heroes of *The Pillars*, are humanity stamped clearly with the Moberly, Yonge, Keble pattern. They could belong to no other period or surroundings.

Although the Underwoods are not individually as lovable as the Mays they are curiously interesting as a family. The history of thirteen children is certain to provide plenty of incident; someone is always being born, falling ill, marrying or dying, and when interest in Felix flags the reader can always turn to the affairs of Wilmet, Geraldine, Lancelot, or some of the smaller fry. The plot is more coherent than that of *The Daisy Chain* and there is real suspense in watching the outcome of the struggle waged by the thirteen orphans against hardship and grinding poverty.

The father of the children is Edward Underwood, a parson who loses his family inheritance of Vale Leston through a flaw in his uncle's will. He takes a curacy in the industrial town of Bexley, where, worn out by poverty and hard work, he dies of consumption at the early age of thirty-nine, leaving a wife and thirteen children all under the age of seventeen. This prodigious and youthful family is only achieved with the aid of two pairs of twins, the last pair born on Epiphany morning, the very day of their father's death.

"The morning star was shining in the delicate dawn full in view, and he looked at it with quiet pleasure. 'Mother,' he said; then, recollecting himself: 'ah, she is resting!'

"At that moment a little cry through the thin wall made him start and flush.

"'Is it so?' he murmured; 'thank God! That is well!' But his chest heaved grievously as he panted with anxiety, and his two watchers hesitated what to do, until the door was slightly opened, and before the intended sign could be made to Felix the breathless exclamation, 'How? what?' brought Sibby's half-scared, mournful countenance forward.

"'How is she, Sibby? don't fear to say,' he said, more collectedly.

"'Nicely, sir, as well as can be expected; but—'

"'The baby? Alive—I heard—'

"'Yes, sir; that is—O sir, it is two: and it would be a mere mercy if they are taken, as they look to be—twins, and coming like this!' Perhaps Sibby was a little more lamentable because, instead of looking shocked, he clasped his hands in eager thanksgiving, as he looked upwards.

"'It is another great mercy,' he said. 'Much better than longer

waiting on me. Will these Twelfth-day gifts live? Or do I take them with me? At least, let me baptise them—now at once,' he spoke earnestly. 'My full twelve, and one over, and on Twelfth-day.'"

The old nurse Sibby appears to have had more common sense than her master, but it is something that Mr. Underwood should at least have had the grace to "start and flush" on hearing of the twins' arrival. No one apparently pointed out to him that tuberculosis is transmitted from parent to child, or that it was courting disaster to bring two delicate babies into close contact with a patient in the last stages of the disease. As things turned out, neither of the twins contracted consumption, although the little boy, piously named Theodore, "the gift of God," grew up an idiot, but two of the older children contracted the disease, Felix suffering from a sinister cough and Geraldine being crippled for life by a tubercular ankle joint. Even if Mr. Underwood could have foreseen these disasters it is doubtful whether he would have suffered a single qualm of conscience over his headlong career of parenthood. It was the part of a dutiful father and parson to beget as many children as possible, to make certain that they were baptised as little Christians, and to leave their bodily health, their upbringing, and their education in the hands of Providence. It never seems to have occurred to Mr. Underwood that it would have been more natural for a parent to attend to the material needs of his offspring, trusting their spiritual salvation to the care of the Almighty.

All through his last illness Edward Underwood's wife had insisted on nursing him, and his desire to have her constantly by his side is held up as an example of husbandly devotion although he must have known that sick-nursing was the worst possible occupation for an expectant mother. After the birth of the twins this long-suffering woman becomes a permanent invalid, living on for three years, bedridden and half-imbecile, as an additional burden on her thirteen children who are thus left "almost worse than orphans." Meanwhile, Charlotte, who is innocently blind to the shocking implications of his career, has allowed Edward Underwood to die peacefully in the odour of sanctity, leaving his heavy responsibilities on the shoulders of Felix and Wilmet, the youthful "pillars of the house."

Felix had intended to take Holy Orders, but in an effort to eke out the family finances he abandons his education at the age of sixteen and apprentices himself to worthy Mr. Froggart, the local printer and bookseller. His action means a descent in social position, in Charlotte's eyes the worst sacrifice of all; to her the hardships suffered by thirteen children trying to make do on an income of £220 a year weigh as

nothing against the awful fact of loss of caste. "To turn tradesman for the sake of one's brothers and sisters, that I do call heroic!" However, the thirteen manage to survive the struggle for existence, and in course of time Felix attains a respectable position of much influence in the town. Whilst she was writing *The Pillars of the House* Charlotte was frequently at Wantage, where she must have met Mr. Nichols, the local bookseller, a pious and scholarly man whose character may have suggested various points in her portrait of Felix. Influential as Felix becomes, it is made quite plain that he remains "Mister" and not "Esquire" until he emerges at last as squire of Vale Leston, his father's rightful inheritance. However, he does not live long to enjoy these well-deserved honours. Theodore, the idiot twin, is drowned in a boating accident; Felix's unavailing efforts at rescue bring on severe haemorrhage, and a year later he dies surrounded by a weeping family of brothers and sisters.

Felix himself is more worthy than interesting, although he was Charlotte's own favourite among her heroes. She had less sympathy with the second "pillar," Wilmet, a wonderful *hausfrau* and manager. There must indeed have been an element of the miraculous about Wilmet's housekeeping, for we are assured that she fed, clothed, housed, and doctored her enormous family on something less than £5 a week. For household tasks Charlotte herself had neither taste nor aptitude, and although she might affect to despise the blue-stocking and to look askance at University education for women, she could never bring herself to regard the really domesticated female as anything but an uncongenial bore. Retribution, sweet and subtle, overtakes Wilmet on her marriage; Charlotte must have smiled to herself as she presented that notable matron with two of the nastiest children imaginable.

Alda, twin sister to Wilmet, is a heartless, pretty creature who marries a baronet for his title and produces a family of unwanted daughters. In a later book we are told that the longed-for heir appeared at last on the very day that his father died of delirium tremens. So much for Alda. Of the remaining children the most important are scapegrace Edgar, who trifles with his faith, refuses to be confirmed, and gets himself very properly scalped by Red Indians; the crippled Geraldine, a delicate, artistic and temperamentally nervous child, who develops after Wilmet's marriage into an attractive hostess at Vale Leston; Clement, a priggish little Anglo-Catholic; and Lance, a cathedral choir-boy and a darling. Lance it is who carries on the publishing business after the family move to Vale Leston, and who ultimately marries Gertrude Margaret, the Daisy of *The Daisy Chain*. Dr. May, Tom and Ethel, flit in and out of these pages, and even Flora puts in a brief appearance, much chastened

by anxiety for her one remaining daughter. Other old friends are among the minor characters of the story ; "Sister Constance," prime comfort and support of the orphaned family, was once Constance Somerville of *The Castle Builders*, and Robina, Lance's nearest and dearest sister, goes as governess in Lady de la Poer's household, and there meets Kate Caergwent, heroine of *Countess Kate*. It is as if in *The Pillars of the House* Charlotte gathers together all her favourite characters in a story that was to express more clearly than any of her other books her whole philosophy of life.

The main tenet of that philosophy is explained by the alternative title, *The Pillars of the House, or Under Wode, Under Rode*. "Bear thy cross and thy cross will bear thee, like little Geraldine's crutch or cross potent," is Mr. Underwood's exposition of his family motto. The point is clear enough ; a man is not made or marred by his circumstances unless, indeed, he is unable to use adversity in the right way. Charlotte's view of the matter is not quite synonymous with Cassius' famous exclamation, "The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars" ; it is better expressed by her own John Keble's morning hymn :

"The common round, the daily task
Will furnish all we need to ask,
Room to deny ourselves, a road
To bring us daily nearer God."

It may be good for our souls to remain underlings.

Good for souls perhaps, but not good for intellect or artistic talent. Rebellious Edgar might well point out that the narrow life which made fine Christians of Geraldine and Lance meant the total loss of Lance's musical gifts and the stifling of Geraldine's artistic talent. This point of view was one to which Charlotte remained obstinately blind, perhaps because of her devotion to the memory of her father. William Yonge had abandoned a promising career to settle down to a life which gave no scope for the exercise of his undoubted gifts, and in Charlotte's eyes William Yonge could do no wrong. When she opened her Bible at the parable of the Talents, did she never think that her father, like Geraldine and Lance, had left his talent unused and wrapt in a napkin, a sin not merely against his fellow-men, but against God ?

Perhaps Charlotte treated so lightly the loss of potential musicians and painters in Lance and Geraldine because she herself had very little taste for art unless it were connected with religion. Art for art's sake was gibberish to her ; "every picture tells a story," and the more virtuous the story the better the picture. Of music she knew nothing and cared

less, although she makes the Underwoods a highly musical family, perhaps in imitation of the musical Moberlys. "An odd question, but can you tell me what Edward first taught himself on the violin?" she asks Emily Moberly. "I want Lance Underwood to do it, and must mention some tune." In similar manner she writes to Christabel Coleridge to ask advice about Geraldine's art studies, and about the practical details of Edgar's career as a student at the Royal Academy. If one of the Underwoods had been obliged to stifle leanings towards authorship her attitude might have been a little more sympathetic.

Squalid circumstances might be no barrier to the good life, but squalid ancestry was another matter. Although Felix's position was that of a penurious tradesman we are never allowed to forget for one moment that he was by birth an Underwood of Vale Leston. The humble poor might be good Christians, but Charlotte hesitated to admit the claim of the *parvenu* to entry at Heaven's gate; whatever might be true of wealthy landlords of unimpeachable pedigree, the proverbial eye of a needle was an impassable barrier to the newly-rich. This dislike of the self-made man was the natural complement to Charlotte's horror of ostentation in any form and her insistence on the duties as well as the privileges of an aristocracy. Geraldine and Robina, as the ladies of Vale Leston, must help in house and kitchen or go out governessing in order that Felix may have money enough to restore the church, to repair cottages, and to build schools. In her picture of Vale Leston, where Felix as Lord of the Manor eschews horses, hunting, dinner-parties, and the usual county gaieties in order to devote himself to good works and the simple life, Charlotte paints her view of Utopia, a country where there are no extremes of poverty or luxury and the Squire gives his money, time, and attention to the needs of his tenants and the work of the parish church. It is all very idyllic, very British, and very undemocratic. *The Pursuivant*, a paper edited by Felix in Bexley days and later carried on by Lance, was a paper "on the right side" in politics, the right side in more senses than one. Yet it was something that Charlotte should admit the existence of *The Pursuivant* as well as Vale Leston, acknowledging that Felix the plebeian journalist was as worthy a soldier in the fight against evil as Felix the aristocratic Squire. Charlotte judged all things by their attitude towards that fight; fundamentally she approved of aristocracy because she honestly believed that aristocrats fought on the Lord's side whilst democrats fought for the devil. "I know, of course, that the Church must not be political, but do not Liberals show themselves her natural enemies?" In *The Pillars of the House*, as in all Charlotte's other books, religion is her real interest, and every action, every character, is auto-

matically referred back to that touchstone. With the passage of years her religion has become slightly more ritualistic in form, but it remains essentially reticent in expression. No book could be more permeated with religious feeling than *The Daisy Chain*, yet the word "God" does not once occur in it, and though *The Pillars of the House* is slightly more outspoken she will go to any lengths of circumlocution to avoid the mention of the Sacred Name.

The Underwoods' religious zeal may seem a little unconvincing today. It is hard to believe that a girl of fifteen could find her greatest pleasure in a choir festival and a boy of the same age, whose whole heart is in music, refuse the chance of a musical career because "you must know that the fever and transport that comes of one kind of music has nothing good in it," adding that it was not right "to turn the training I had for God's praise into singing love songs to get money and fame." It seems as if human beings could scarcely breathe in such a rarefied atmosphere where humour there is none. Yet in the eighteen-seventies human beings, and very young human beings, lived habitually in atmospheres even more rarefied. Truth is stranger than fiction, and nothing that Charlotte ever wrote could read as curiously today as that fragment of real life which Mr. Osbert Sitwell entitled "*Vestals and Vestries*" and published as the second half of his book, *Two Generations*. Miss Florence Sitwell's journal begins in 1873, the year of the publication of *The Pillars of the House*, when the diarist is fifteen, and continues until 1877, the artless self-revelation of a flesh-and-blood young lady almost contemporary with the fictitious Geraldine Underwood. Miss Sitwell's surroundings were not those of Bexley or even of Vale Leston, nor would the form of religion practised in the Underwood family have commended itself to the anonymous Archdeacon who was her spiritual mentor, but in spirit she is one with Felix and Geraldine. Her strictures on London society might well have been echoed by Wilmet, remembering the moral decline which overtook Alda when introduced to the season's gaieties. "Mother thinks our dear relations are going to make a set at us, to try and bring us into the vortex of London life; and that she does not want for me, neither do I wish it; we came up to town to see our friends and relations, and get, if possible, among a good and interesting set of people. Mother said she would prefer Grace and me sitting a good deal by ourselves, as she so disliked us hearing the kind of talk that went on."

Far more enjoyable than the season's round of pleasure were the ecclesiastical treats which London afforded, tickets for services at the Abbey, sermons by a Mr. Wilkinson whom Miss Sitwell admired beyond any other preacher, meetings with Dean Farrar, and, as the height of

bliss, visits to Fulham or to Lambeth Palace. Across the background of Miss Sitwell's life flit a galaxy of aunts, cousins, and female friends who can always be trusted to add an element of excitement by falling dangerously ill at frequent intervals. Here is an account of a visit to Kate, her dearest friend :

"I found her lying on the sofa. I made a rush at her with the flowers, and spoke to her for quite a minute, I think, with my face hidden on her shoulder, before I discovered that her aunt was standing close by. So I had to get up with a hot face and apologise. Her aunt said she should leave me to enjoy Kate and went off in a minute or two.

"Kate had received beautiful presents—among other things two volumes of Farrar's *Life of Christ*, and the Septuagint, which she has been reading lately—beside about nine letters from different people. 'But the worst of it is, answering them,' she said in a weary voice. She told me a little about Grace Dundas, who is such a nice, useful girl. It seems she has an elder sister who is not half as nice as herself and is continually wanting the maid which they have between them to do things for her, for she thinks a great deal about dressing, so that is the reason that Grace Dundas feels so much not being able to go about alone, as she has often to sit at home with no one to take her about when she wants to help people. She plays most beautifully.

"But beside this, Kate said very little. She seemed to me to be too tired either to think or speak and there was such a weary tone in her voice, it quite shocked me. She held me close to her with her arms round me, for a long time. She said she could not get used to lying still and not being strong enough to do anything, and she said: 'I am afraid I am very wicked about it!'"

The style is Miss Sitwell's own, but Charlotte herself could not have written a scene whose substance was more authentic "Miss Yonge."

So high-flown did Miss Sitwell's religious sentiments become—"she leaps, flies, soars into a world where religious excitement is to be derived from everything about her"—that if Charlotte had ever met the young lady in question she would probably have stigmatised her as very silly. An account of two visits to Otterbourne in 1872 and 1873 written by Miss Wordsworth shows Charlotte to have been at this time a very sensible and sober Christian, who was not always above allowing her thoughts to wander in church to such unseemly subjects as her personal appearance. "Went to church 9 a.m. As we got out afterwards she amused me by saying, 'Do tell me, is my hat on hind side before? I have had such horrid misgivings about it.'"



CHARLOTTE YONGE IN ELDERFIELD GARDEN WITH HER GIRLS,
SUNDAY-SCHOOL CLASS. *Cir. 1872.*

THE BARNACLE.

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Miss Wordsworth's account makes it clear that in these early years after her mother's death, when she was busy upon the *Life of Bishop Patteson* and *The Pillars of the House*, Charlotte retained enough of her eager liveliness to make development still a possibility and decline not inevitable. She was only fifty, and if she had been able and willing to maintain contact with minds as active as her own she might well have continued to write books as good or better than any of her earlier work. But when her old circle of friends broke up she could not make new ones for herself. Her natural reserve was a great barrier, and so too were her dislike of travel and her unwillingness to face new scenes and new people. Even so, intellectual society was not entirely out of her reach, for many outstanding people of her day would have been only too glad of an invitation to visit her at home in Otterbourne. Invitations, however, were not forthcoming. Charlotte was glad of any excuse that would allow her to retire farther and farther into her shell, and in 1873 she cut herself off more completely than ever before by giving up the one spare-room in her small house to Gertrude Walter, Frances Yonge's invalid sister.

Miss Walter was not the evil influence on Charlotte's life that some critics have supposed her to be. In some respects she was indeed more of a help than a hindrance; she could relieve Charlotte of many burdensome small tasks and provide her with constant companionship of a more or less intellectual kind, but her presence kept other visitors from the house and as her illness increased her invalidism made more and more trying demands upon time and nerves. It was hard for a woman with a constitutional dislike of illness to be obliged to share her home with a permanent invalid, and only Charlotte's complete disregard of self could have made her tolerate the arrangement. Fortunately Gertrude Walter was an intelligent and affectionate woman, eager and willing to show her gratitude and admiration for the friend who gave her so much; it was not her fault but her misfortune that her presence at Elderfield should force Charlotte into unfruitful isolation by cutting off the last possibility of contact with the outside world.

Charlotte was not altogether happy in her self-chosen retirement for she was finding herself left behind in the race of life, an experience peculiarly bitter to a person of her zeal and energy. Even her Goslings had outgrown the sheltering wing of Mother Goose. "I have my doubts whether you are not right," she writes to Christabel Coleridge, "and goosedom has had its day. Certainly it has been a very great pleasure to its mother but it has been languishing so long that I think it would be better to enact a finale." One Michaelmas Day, therefore,

a symbolic dinner of roast goose marked the end of that once lively brood.

Gosedon and all such amateur attempts at self-education were indeed out-dated now that the higher education of women was no longer a fancy but a fact. Charlotte had no sympathy with the new movement. In 1868 she wrote to Miss Emily Davies deprecating the idea of a college for women :

“ I am obliged to you for your letter respecting the proposed College for Ladies, but as I have decided objections to bringing large masses of girls together and think that home education under the inspection and encouragement of sensible fathers, or voluntarily continued by the girls themselves, is far more valuable both intellectually and morally than any external education, I am afraid I cannot assist you.

“ I feel with much regret that female education is deficient, but I think the way to meet the evil is by rousing the parents to lead their daughters to read, think, and converse. All the most superior women I have known have been thus formed, by *home* influence, and I think that girls in large numbers always hurt one another in manner and tone if in *nothing* else. Superior women will teach themselves, and inferior women will never learn more than enough for home life.

“ I say this much to shew that I do not hold back from the plan without thinking it over.”

A few years later she was approached by Edward Talbot, then Warden of Keble, on the subject of the foundation of Lady Margaret Hall. This time she shifted the ground of her objection from the educational to the religious issue :

“ I do not think any scheme succeeds that has not a decided religious object, and in my mind the real difficulty is that this plan seems to be Lectures plus Church, not like the original conception of a College, education primarily for the direct service of religion to which other students were admitted. If it is to be merely a boarding-house on good principles where young ladies may be sent to prepare for examinations it may be a sound institution worthy of support but not commanding any enthusiasm and likely to depend on the fashion of the day. But if it were in any way possible to make it in some way an institution dedicated to Heavenly Wisdom, training the daughters of the Church to the more perfect cultivation of their talents whether as educators or mothers of families, then I think there would be such salt of the earth in the College as to make it lasting and beloved and to be a real blessing in raising the whole ideal and standard of women.”

Charlotte’s ideas on primary as well as higher education did not

coincide with the prevailing fashions of thought and her beloved schools at Otterbourne fell far short of the educational standards of the 'seventies. The new parson who took Mr. Bigg-Wither's place could not avoid pointing out the deficiencies in the schools or making "absolutely needed" changes in the church and the services, that church which had been considered so advanced in the days of Mr. Keble. Charlotte's conservative nature rebelled against the introduction of a spliced choir, choral services, and the use of *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, but, narrow-minded though she might be, there was nothing petty about her narrow-mindedness. Neither selfishness nor self-importance had any place in her make-up, and the generosity of her nature made her instinctively mistrust her objections to changes that hurt her personal feelings. Common sense told her that "we shall not find that everything is mischievous because we never thought of it before," so, swallowing her feelings, she loyally accepted the necessity for Government inspection in the schools. Where Otterbourne Church was concerned she went so far as to pay out of her own pocket for an organ and for additions to the chancel necessary to accommodate that obnoxious spliced choir. Charlotte's nature presented a fundamental paradox; essentially incapable of progress herself, she yet admired and encouraged progress in others. The pity was that, although she might do her best to sympathise with this new world growing up around her, she could not understand the young people of the day as she had understood the contemporaries of her own youth, a lack of comprehension which reacted disastrously on her literary achievement.

CHAPTER TWELVE

CHARLOTTE'S FIRST BOOK was published in 1844, her last in 1901. Her career as an author lasted for nearly sixty years, but the last thirty produced only one book, *Unknown to History*, which is read today outside the charmed circle of true enthusiasts. Even these admirers would prefer to pass lightly over most of the work published by their idol after 1873. Sometimes, of course, the stream of Charlotte's inspiration sparkled with something of the old charm, but for the most part it flowed ever more slowly until it lost itself in the morass of those shapeless stories, *Two Sides of a Shield*, *The Long Vacation*, and *Modern Broods*.

The late 'seventies did, however, see the appearance of two books which are a delight to the lover of Charlotte. *Magnum Bonum* is yet another family saga. The Brownlows have but the slightest connection with any other family of Charlotte's imagination, and perhaps this lack of the accustomed background makes the book less attractive than its fellows. Charlotte's habit of dovetailing her books one into another produces an extraordinary illusion of reality. Here is a world complete with its own doctors, parsons, schools, newspapers, all the paraphernalia of daily life, the perfect realm of make-believe. When Felix Underwood of *The Pillars of the House* requires medical advice he consults Dr. May of *The Daisy Chain*, Clement Underwood goes as curate to Robert Fulmort of *Hopes and Fears*, and marriages between the various clans are legion. The Brownlows are not inhabitants of this dream world, and in consequence *Magnum Bonum* lacks the feeling of solidity which characterises the earlier family novels, but it is a good story nevertheless, more convincing in the earlier chapters than later on when the Brownlows suddenly rise to affluence. Charlotte could never make riches as interesting as poverty, and even the entrancing Underwoods lose something of their charm when translated to Vale Leston.

The brilliant family of Brownlows, heroes of the tale, are contrasted with their worthy but stupid cousins who, not content with the same surname, must needs duplicate Christian names as well, producing inextricable confusion in the first few chapters. Soon, however, Charlotte's genius for characterisation triumphs over even this self-imposed obstacle, and half-way through the first volume no self-respecting reader would dream of making a mistake between the various Roberts, Johnnies, Janets, and Joes. The four young girls, Babie, Esther, Ellie, and Elvira, are clever studies of character, but poor Janet, who marries a rascally

Greek and comes to a sad end, is one of the least convincing of Charlotte's caricatures of an intellectual woman. Janet's adventures in America, like those of Averil Ward in *The Trial*, are a reminder that Charlotte, like Dickens, regarded the United States as a land of fever-ridden swamps inhabited by a race of uncivilised hoboes. In her day this opinion was not so entirely wide of the mark, but even if she had possessed the imagination to guess at potential greatness hidden in small beginnings her verdict would not have been more enthusiastic. Modern American civilisation and the ideals of Otterbourne are poles asunder. *The Daisy Chain*, unlike *Little Women*, could never take kindly to the medium of the film.

Three fat volumes of *Magnum Bonum* are heavy going for the novice. Not so *Womankind*, a book which is a joy for ever. Perhaps, however, outsiders should not be encouraged to dip too freely into this treasure, for only those who love Charlotte have the right to laugh at her. *Womankind* is a collection of papers which appeared first in *The Monthly Packet*, dealing with the whole life of woman from the cradle to the grave, "Woman," of course, being taken as synonymous with "Lady living in comparatively comfortable circumstances." Some would mock at Charlotte for a snob, but wiser minds admire the sound sense which recognised its own limitations. Knowing very little about the working-class woman, she would not presume to offer her advice as to the conduct of her life.

The chapter-headings of *Womankind* include "Dress," "Courtship," "Wives," "The World," "Mistress and Servant," and each one is a rich entertainment. Charlotte's views on dress would not be expected to coincide with those of the present generation, so that it is not surprising to learn that "it is parting with all the true dignity of the virtuous woman to try to change hair or complexion," but some of her statements, made in profound innocence, are enough to startle the not so innocent. Most amazing of all is the chapter on "Wives," which includes the astonishing classification of wives into "the cowed woman, the dead-weight, the *maitresse-femme*, and the helpmeet." The *maitresse-femme* is not what the wicked might expect; by this somewhat equivocal phrase Charlotte merely means the wife "who governs with a high hand by force of vehemence and determination" in contrast to the dead-weight, a woman unable to exist "without a fond husband who will let her lie prone upon him." She sums up the cowed woman in one pithy sentence: "poor thing, she has generally made a mistake." The helpmeet also must frequently have made an error in her choice of a husband, for she is urged not to suspect him of being in mischief and warned that "the

worst thing she can do is to seem hurt or injured, or say a word to remind him of her weary waiting." The ideal helpmeet would seem to be Violet Martindale of *Heartsease*, a self-effacing creature who allowed an erring husband to impose grossly upon her sweet temper. Unsympathetic readers might prefer to class Violet as a cowed woman, "whose life is spent in trembling endurance and endeavour to avoid exciting his anger towards herself or her children; often, too, in the piteously loyal attempt to conceal from her nearest and best friends that anything is amiss." Poor Mrs. Underwood must perhaps be counted a dead-weight, worn down by the combination of too little money and too many children. Flora May is the *maîtresse-femme* and an admirable wife into the bargain, so admirable indeed that, much as her creator disliked her, she might almost qualify for the category of helpmeet. She answers exactly to Charlotte's description of the perfect wife for the weak husband: "But if the man be really the weaker vessel and the rule is necessarily in the wife's hands, how is it then to be? To tell the truth, I believe that the really loving wife never finds it out." Poor Flora found it out quickly enough. "She keeps the glamour of love and loyalty between herself and her husband, and so infuses herself into him that the weaknesses never become apparent to her, to him, or to most lookers-on, and those who do perceive on which side lies the strength respect her too much to betray their suspicions, nay, respect him too."

This deep wisdom and shrewd observation of human relationships contrasts strangely with the naïveté of a chapter which must raise unkind smiles even from the most besotted of Charlotte's admirers. *Womankind* does, however, contain many wise and pungent comments on life, especially in the chapter "Going in," a title chosen to point a contrast with that blissful period of life known as "Coming out." Charlotte describes "Going in" out of the fullness of her own experience, for at the time of writing she herself was passing through the trial of "that elderly period when our strength and power have not failed us, but our vigour and enterprise have, and the young are getting a little impatient of us." There is something very pathetic about the middle-aged woman's description of those who have lost the attractions of youth without as yet attaining to the serenity of old age: "Yes, but when we are elderly and not old we don't seem to attain these venerable graces. Indeed, we often do not feel ourselves ageing, and we are surprised, and half-affronted, when our contemporaries are called by the young *old*, and for ourselves, we are half diverted, half saddened, by finding that we have come in for the same epithet."

In 1875 Charlotte was to experience another of the trials of "going-

in," "that overthrow of well-arranged plans that comes to some when they are in full work." For many years she had contemplated endowing her native parish out of the money she earned by her books. The fulfilment of this scheme may seem an uninteresting ambition for a famous author and its overthrow a very small trial, but to Charlotte the dedication of her savings had long been a cherished dream. Now at last Otterbourne was to be separated from Hursley and made into a parish, but just at the moment when this division made the gift of her money a possibility another and nearer claim arose. Julian Yonge's folly or misfortune involved him in financial disaster and only Charlotte's money could save him from ruin. To give to the Church would have been the most delightful of pleasures, but to give to her own family was a duty, and between duty and pleasure Charlotte never hesitated. Her cherished plans were abandoned and the money went into Julian's pocket.

The relationship between the two households at Otterbourne House and at Elderfield was a warmer one than in the first years of Julian's marriage. Frances Yonge was a lively, energetic woman, and although her activities and Charlotte's followed different courses each had learnt to respect and admire the other's capabilities. Charlotte took great delight in the nephews and nieces at Otterbourne House and she would sometimes write plays for them and their young friends. One of these plays was "Bluebird," with Charlotte herself in the name part, complete with beard. All the other characters had to be word-perfect, but Charlotte, presuming on the privileges of authorship, improvised hers as she went along, much to the confusion of the rest of the cast, who were for the most part at least forty years her junior.

Plays and play-acting recalled happy days at Winchester long ago. Charlotte could still number the Moberlys among her dearest friends, and she delighted in her visits to their home in the Palace at Salisbury, "a strange house of broad staircases and long passages, the great drawing-room a huge place, with three doors and three enormous windows, but charming ones—one looking on the spire, one over the garden, one across the paddock and pond to the green hill; not an atom of town to be seen." One of the happiest days spent at Salisbury was the wedding-day of her god-daughter, Maggie. In compliment to the bride's connection with *The Daisy Chain* everyone present wore bunches of daisies, the bride herself walked to the Cathedral across a daisied lawn, and small attendants scattered daisies before her instead of the conventional rose-petals. This daisy-bestarred wedding made a fitting pendant to that happy christening twenty-two years earlier when Charlotte had whispered to Mrs. Moberly that she intended writing a story about a good Margaret.

Old friends and old scenes were the greatest of Charlotte's pleasures. She refused all persuasions from the Heathcotes to accompany them on a visit to Rome, clinging more and more closely with the passage of the years to the comfort of unchanging, familiar places. She loved her home and the quiet country around with an almost passionate intensity, and she especially rejoiced to revisit the well-known haunts in company with friends who could remember her father and John Keble in "the golden age of Hursley and Otterbourne." One day she wrote to the Moberlys asking them "to renew old times with her in the woods," and on an afternoon when the heather was purple she met them at Chandler's Ford, intending to walk over to Cuckoo Bushes and "the steep, stony hill." But although the spirit was as eager as ever it was in the days when Moberlys and Yonges had walked homewards over Ladwell Hill after listening to an hour-long sermon from Mr. Keble, the flesh was thirty years older than in those care-free times. She was persuaded to rest herself rather than attempt the long walk, and the Moberly sisters sighed a little sadly as they watched the elderly, upright figure walking slowly homewards under the oaks of Cranbury Park.

But even if she was unable to get very far afield Charlotte enjoyed no less rapturously the seasonal delights of the countryside, and every year bluebells and daffodils, seedtime and harvest, never failed to bring her reassurance and delight. Even when recording the death of her old friend Joanna Patteson she could not refrain from mentioning her pleasure in the splendid summer: "I never knew a year of such sweet smells; the sheets of wild honeysuckle are quite amazing."

The death of another old friend marked the beginning of the eighteen-eighties. Marianne Dyson had been ill so long that the end came as no shock, but for Charlotte her death snapped the last link with the happy heyday of youth when *The Heir of Redclyffe* was the talk of drawing-room and common-room alike. The books which chiefly occupied her attention during the 'eighties were of a very different character to *The Heir of Redclyffe*. Two years after Marianne's death she published *Unknown to History*, a historical tale of Elizabeth and Mary Queen of Scots and the most successful novel of her later years, but she devoted most of her time and energy to stories suitable for Sunday-school reading, to simple historical books, religious readers and the like, published for the most part by the National Society. *Sewing and Sowing; a Sexagesima Story*, *Aunt Charlotte's Evenings at Home with the Poets*, *The Instructive Picture Book*, or *Lessons from the Vegetable World*, were the titles of some of these productions, which were none the less pot-boilers because the pot they boiled was not Charlotte's own.

She was greatly interested in the production of "wholesome and amusing literature," which she considered "almost a necessity among the appliances of parish work." A booklet entitled *What Books to Lend and What to Give* provides a list of titles classified under such headings as "For Missionary Working-Parties," "Drawing-room Stories," "Penny Readings," and "Improving Books." Charlotte has some shrewd comments to make on the varying tastes of the different classes of readers. Village women dislike "a book manifestly meant for children lent to themselves, though they do enjoy anything about a baby from a maternal point of view." According to Charlotte, girls "often greatly prefer a book about the other sex whilst boys almost universally disdain a book about girls." Her remarks about the books recommended include some gems of criticism. It is reassuring to learn that all Jules Verne's works are "perfectly safe, for he is a religious, sound-hearted man," but poor Mr. Ballantyne is "apt to be rather confused where any Church matter comes into question." Mrs. Ewing's *Jackanapes* is rather surprisingly classed as a boys' book; "this beautiful story wins the attention of boys but those who read it to them find it necessary to skip the incident of the elopement." Of all the books mentioned in the section "Novels and Novelettes" only Charlotte's own works and *Mary Barton* have escaped oblivion. Fairy tales both old and new come in for commendation although we are warned that "it takes some cultivation" to enjoy either *The Water Babies* or *Alice in Wonderland*. *Pilgrim's Progress* is recommended "in spite of its peculiarities . . . for it is unlikely that Bunyan's doctrines will do any harm," but a book which describes the enthusiasm of Wesleyanism is "to be given with due caution." *The Prince and the Pauper* suffers from "one grievous fault"; it marries a man to his sister-in-law.

Charlotte's choice of books may provoke a smile, but at least she saw to it that the villagers of Otterbourne had reading matter at their disposal. She had no patience with the school of thought which believed in withholding books from the working woman because "she ought to be too busy to want them," just as she would never grudge pretty clothes to her school-children. "Oh dear," sighed a conservative friend, surveying the band of little girls, "look at their smart aprons bound with red! Alas for the long, straight pinafores of our youth!" "Why shouldn't they have pretty aprons?" Charlotte promptly replied. "They look better and the children like them." She was not so old-fashioned in her views on schools and school-children as some might imagine; and fifty years ago she anticipated the modern demand for school libraries. "A library is an almost indispensable adjunct to a school. . . . There ought always

to be a school library unless the children are provided for in the general parish library." How many elementary schools and how many parishes are still without libraries in this year of grace?

Charlotte's preoccupation with the needs of the parish library may have been good for the parish but it was certainly bad for Charlotte. She was deliberately writing for uneducated readers and the limits she set herself cramped both her style and her imagination. In some of these stories she returns to the Langley school-children of her youth, but the spell is broken and although she may resurrect the characters she cannot renew the old charm. In books written for a different type of reader other old friends are brought to life once more but with even less success. The Mohuns and Merrifields who fill the pages of *Two Sides of a Shield* and *Beechcroft at Rockstone* are but grown-up shadows of the entrancing children of *Scenes and Characters* and *The Stokesley Secret*.

Charlotte was happier when she turned her mind back to reminiscences of her childhood and the stories her parents had told her about still earlier times. In *Chantrey House*, a story of rural England in the days of George IV, she recaptured for a moment the atmosphere of that lotus-eating time before steam-engines ruined the peace of the country-side or *The Tracts for the Times* blew a blast loud enough to wake even the Church of England from slumber.

Changes at Otterbourne must have recalled her childhood to her with peculiar and rather bitter vividness. In 1884, a year before the publication of *Chantrey House*, Julian Yonge sold Otterbourne House and moved away from the neighbourhood, and Charlotte knew that after her death there would be no member of her family to carry on the tradition of public service and private piety that Otterbourne connected with the name of Yonge. The same year saw the death of Bishop Moberly and the break-up of the happy household in the Palace, a place which had become almost a second home to Charlotte. "I always said Mrs. Moberly was like Early English Architecture, and thus it seemed in the perfect fitness of things to see her under the shadow of Salisbury Cathedral." But even away from that ideal setting Mary Anne Moberly's beauty, hardly dimmed by old age, still drew people to her like a magnet. In the new home in a dull street, noisy with the passing of omnibuses and the screaming of children at play beneath the windows, Charlotte's visits were counted red-letter days. She herself cherished this "looking-up friendship," whilst the old lady looked forward eagerly to an afternoon of enlivening conversation on subjects ranging from Church politics to ghost stories. Charlotte had always been fascinated by ghosts, and she introduced a not too successful one into *Chantrey House*.

A bond in common with the younger Moberlys was the newly formed Girls' Friendly Society, in which Charlotte was deeply interested, although she was not above a laugh at the expense of over-enthusiastic members. "There is a story now come for *The Monthly Packet* where a girl thinks a man an atheist because he does not know what G.F.S. means. I expect the regular G.F.S. worshippers will not like that at all." Perhaps because she was so much cut off from contacts with persons, Charlotte was becoming more and more absorbed in causes and societies. Her shyness made dealings with individuals difficult but it proved to be no hindrance in the committee-room, where her common sense and originality of outlook—"she never was cut-and-dried"—soon made her invaluable. She was on the Board of Governors of the new Girls' High School in Winchester, but dearer than all other causes to her heart was the Society for Higher Religious Education. The combination of the two aims, religious and educational, set out in the somewhat ponderous title, was sure to prove irresistible to Charlotte. She lectured to the Society, she set and corrected examination papers, she worked unsparingly for this cause which interested her beyond all others. She herself found religion to be the most exciting of subjects, and she taught it as if religious instruction were more interesting and important than any other school lesson. Although she insisted on the teaching of religion in schools she believed that responsibility lay first and foremost with the parents: "I beg parents not to trust to present feeling but to take care to lay a solid foundation of actual dogma and fact, and to cultivate intelligence. If the teaching is regular, and deepened and widened by the numerous fields of interest, theological, historical, geographical, ecclesiastical, there is no fear but that it will retain the children's interest and that boys and girls alike will enjoy it as part of the delights of home."

Few indeed were the parents qualified to teach Scripture in the manner suggested. It was too much to ask of a busy housewife or hostess that she should make herself conversant with "the many fields of interest, theological, historical, geographical, ecclesiastical," the one field of interest, of course, that was not to be entered being the field of Biblical criticism—"there is a horrid book that I wish someone would cut up; it divides the narrative up, as by the J. E. or P. writers." And if Charlotte demanded much from the teachers she expected correspondingly high standards of achievement from the taught. Her horror was extreme when an examination revealed that "of one hundred and twenty-four girls over twelve years of age, belonging to the upper classes . . . 44% wrote correctly their baptismal vow, 25% only were able to name the three creeds, 40% wrote correctly the Apostles' Creed, 31% a collect

of their own choice, 15% only knew the meaning of the word 'prevent,' 29% only were able to write with anything approaching accuracy 'the Duty to God,' 61% only knew the meaning of 'Jesus,' 20% the meaning of 'Christ,' 8% knew the names of the Apostles, 18% the names of the four great prophets, 3% gave the books of the New Testament correctly, 26% gave from one to three verses regarded as prophecies of our Lord. What had the mothers of these girls been about and how had they spent their Sundays?" What indeed would Charlotte have said to present-day mothers, who are bound to confess that the figures seem to them surprisingly good compared to the abysmal ignorance of most of their own offspring when confronted with the Bible, the Prayer-Book, or the Catechism?

It is significant that these hundred and twenty-four ignoramuses belonged to "the upper classes." Charlotte was especially interested in the religious education of little ladies and gentlemen whose social status deprived them of the advantage of Sunday-school teaching. To collectors of Yongeana the greatest prize of all is a little pamphlet entitled *Religious Education of the Wealthier Classes*, in which Charlotte sets out the whole duty of parents in this matter of religious teaching. Typical both of Charlotte and her age is the phrase "it is well for children to be admitted to visits to their mother's morning toilette to say their prayers with her if in health." The words conjure up the picture of a forgotten world, where in a cosy bedroom with befrilled dressing-table, marble-topped wash-stand, and flowered wall-paper, Mamma sits wrapped in a *peignoir* brushing out her long hair as Nannie brings in the family, neatly washed, brushed, and combed after early breakfast in the nursery. Or, more probably, Mamma is still in bed, enjoying the privileges of invalidism, for it was hardly respectable for a Victorian mother of "the wealthier classes" to admit to being chronically "in health." As for Father, pious indeed must have been those distant days when the devout could reproach him because "*all* the religion that his children know of him"—and the italics are not Charlotte's—"is his reading of family prayers and his attendance at church."

Charlotte's interest in the religious upbringing of children naturally predisposed her in favour of the work of the Mothers' Union, a body which, in spite of its title, has always exercised a peculiar fascination over spinsters. All unintentionally the Mothers' Union was the means of softening a very bitter blow. For nearly forty years *The Monthly Packet* had been the darling child of Charlotte's heart. It was more than a magazine which she had founded and edited; it was her mouthpiece, and her greatest means of influence and self-expression. And now *The*

Monthly Packet was to be reft from her. In Charlotte's youth advertising of any sort had been anathema, and *The Monthly Packet* still continued to shun rather than to court publicity. Circulation was a matter of little moment; the day of publication varied to suit the convenience of the editor, and contributions from distinguished authors outside the small circle approved by Charlotte were severely discouraged. A magazine run on these charming but unbusinesslike lines could hardly hope to survive in the hurly-burly of late Victorian journalism, and since the editor refused to change with the times, there was but one thing possible, to change the editor. Very tactfully, very gently, it was pointed out to Charlotte that her beloved *Monthly Packet* was losing subscribers because it was out of touch with the girls of the day and that if it were to survive at all a younger editor must be in control. Christabel Coleridge was chosen as the person likely to be the least obnoxious to Charlotte, but even so the pill was a nasty one to swallow. Letters on the subject come nearer to peevishness than anything Charlotte ever wrote. She was a superb exponent of the art of self-abnegation, but she could not help showing that the loss of *The Monthly Packet* cut her to the quick.

And, after all, Charlotte was right and the prudent publishers wrong. There was no resuscitating *The Monthly Packet*. Charlotte had created it, breathed life into it so that it had become a projection of her own personality, and without her it was a dead thing. Miss Coleridge struggled on for a few years, loyally supported by the editor whom she had supplanted, but in 1895 *The Monthly Packet* went finally out of circulation.

“A sixpenny phoenix” was indeed suggested, but Charlotte was not a little glad that the proposed revival came to nothing. “I confess,” she writes to Christabel Coleridge, “that although I mourn over the *manes* of *The Monthly Packet* I am personally a little relieved, for I was considering what I could honestly personally undertake or allow my name to be used for, in relation first to Truth, secondly in public spirit to the Church and girlhood, and thirdly in justice to kind helpers, and endeavours for a fresh start. Helen has been reading the first volumes and I find that they were almost entirely my best and most enduring things, such as I could hardly imitate, and if I *did* they would be only stale. No, I could not do the same, nor could you, even though you can do better and deeper, and the young and lively do things of their own not in the old grooves of their predecessors.”

In 1890, the very year that Miss Coleridge took on *The Monthly Packet*, Mrs. Sumner, foundress of the Mothers' Union, approached Charlotte with the request that she would become the first editor of

the new Mothers' Union publication, *Mothers in Council*. Rather to Mrs. Sumner's surprise, Charlotte accepted with alacrity. *The Monthly Packet* had thrown her overboard on the score of age, yet here was a new magazine that did not consider her too old at sixty-seven. *Mothers in Council* could never fill the place that *The Monthly Packet* had held in her affections. Circulating only among members of the Mothers' Union, its scope was limited, but it could and did provide an outlet for her still considerable energy, and a platform from which she might expound her views to the type of audience she best liked to address, an audience composed entirely of female members of the Church of England.

Old Mrs. Moberly died in 1890 and Julian Yonge two years later. Charlotte took the loss of her brother very philosophically: "Well, he was very faithful and very loving, though we are all reserved, and it is another link where our hearts should be." More and more her thoughts were turning to the past, especially to the past history of her beloved Otterbourne. In 1895 she published *The Carbonels*, a little-known but attractive story describing in fascinating detail conditions of life in an English village in the eighteen-twenties. Captain Carbonel and his wife Mary, newly come to Uphill in 1822, bear a close resemblance to William and Fanny Yonge, and many of the incidents of the story are based on reminiscences recorded by Charlotte in the early part of her autobiography. To read *The Carbonels* and its sequel, *Founded on Paper*, is to gain a vivid impression of rural England throughout the nineteenth century and to understand something of the changing conditions between the reigns of George IV and Edward VII. *Old Times at Otterbourne* and *John Keble's Parishes*, two books of local history published in 1891 and 1898 respectively, dwell with great charm and accuracy on the details of this vanished world, whilst *An Old Woman's Outlook* describes Otterbourne as Charlotte saw it in 1892.

But, however gracefully Charlotte might invoke the past, she never suffered from that *nostalgie du temps passé* which destroys all present joy. Above all, she seldom made comparisons, and if she did compare, the result was generally in favour of things as they are, not things as they were. "Am I optimistic," she writes to Miss Smith, "or are forty years of work in one place more encouraging than ten? . . . I am quite sure that the good is more intelligent good, and the average at a higher level." She was particularly fond of the fancy, borrowed from a review of *The Idylls of the King*, that the break-up of the Round Table typified the way in which age should regard the activities of youth, and she used this illustration several times, always with a characteristically scrupulous acknowledgment of its origin. "Arthur had made the Round Table his

ideal of the perfection of manhood and knighthood, and for that very reason arose the quest of the Sanc Greal, leading above and beyond, and breaking up the Round Table, to the grief and sorrow of Arthur. And it is this which befalls every generation unless they live in an age of decadence. A Quest will arise out of their Round Table. Their juniors will not rest with their idea of perfection, but will strain on to something beyond, and more their own."

Charlotte at seventy was no spent force, not the Queen-Mother of Otterbourne, as one newspaper described her, but the Queen-Regnant. Archbishop Benson commented on her "odd majesty and kindness, which are very strong." In odd majesty and kindness she ruled over her little world, where, for all her shyness, she could be as much of an autocrat as Queen Victoria herself. One of her nieces was married to Mr. Henry Bowles, who came in 1890 to be vicar of Otterbourne. On Sundays he would catechise the children in church, "Auntie Char" sitting in her accustomed pew and listening intently to every word. Should her unfortunate nephew make a statement not quite in accordance with her views she would rise majestically to her feet and contradict him in front of his assembled scholars.

Charlotte's sway still extended far beyond the narrow confines of Otterbourne, although critics might hint that her books had but little appeal for "the girl of the period." On the afternoon of her seventieth birthday, August 13th, 1893, she was sitting in her room tying up her shoe, when she heard a ring at the bell. Running to the window, she saw two figures slinking away behind the hedge as if anxious to remain unseen. The backs of these mysterious visitors seemed strangely familiar, but why should Edith and Annie Moberly be making off with all the secrecy of a pair of burglars? The maid knocked and came in with a brown paper parcel in her hands. Charlotte tore it open, to discover a fat album, its back powdered with daisies, and inside the signatures of some ten thousand of her admirers, photographs sent by the Queen of Spain and the Queen of Italy, and a cheque for £200. Undemonstrative as Charlotte was, she openly delighted in this surprise, and showed the album with unaffected pleasure to all her favoured visitors.

So the years passed. Otterbourne had come to regard Charlotte in much the same way as the rest of England regarded Queen Victoria. Other people came and went but the Queen remained; they had almost come to believe that she could not die like ordinary women. In 1897 Gertrude Walter, years younger than Charlotte, came to the end of the long martyrdom that illness had made of her life. During the last

months she could bear no light in her room, and every day Charlotte would spend hour after hour with her, sitting quietly in the dark. The relationship between them had come to be one almost of mother and daughter. Before Gertrude's arrival at Elderfield Charlotte had never had anyone to pet, but her maternal instinct had at last found an outlet in the care of this quiet, delicate creature. If Gertrude Walter had unwittingly shut many things out of Charlotte's life she had brought much affection and gentleness into it.

Gertrude's death came too late to broaden the course of Charlotte's life. She was too old now to make new contacts with the outside world and she continued in her old routine, interwoven with the rhythm of the village life around her. As the early morning mists rose from the Itchen, labourers on their way to work saw her neatly dressed figure emerging from Elderfield gate on the way to early service on some saint's day or Church festival. Prayers and breakfast over, she was off to school, taking boys and girls on alternate days for a Scripture class, and sometimes teaching the girls other subjects such as history, grammar, and even needlework. The boys were jealous of her absorption in the girls, wishing for themselves a larger share of her innumerable presents and kindnesses. After school came church once more, and then work at her writing till lunch, which was usually followed by a walk, sometimes in company with her niece Helen, a frequent visitor, who was becoming more dear to her every year. Aunt and niece had other things in common besides their striking physical resemblance; Helen was an intelligent woman, which was important to Charlotte, and she was a religious one, which was essential. After Charlotte's death it was Helen who carried on her work with the Society for Higher Religious Education, and so long as Helen lived in Winchester, a regular attendant at Cathedral services, the likeness to her aunt sometimes tricked older worshippers into imagining another and greater Miss Yonge back with them once more.

Pleasant as it was to linger with Helen on the slopes of Hiltonbury Common or in the water-meadows down by the river, reviving old memories for the benefit of the younger generation, Charlotte was always in her place if any parish activities were going forward. Forty years earlier she had written a rhapsodical paragraph beginning "Who knows not an S.P.G. meeting?" and even at the age of seventy-five she could still feel elation at the prospect of such innocuous gaieties.

After tea, served on the "pretty equipage" bought with part of that wonderful birthday-present (the bulk of the money had gone to provide Otterbourne churchyard with a lych-gate), came proof-reading, editorial

work, and reviewing. She wrote upstairs in a long library, one window looking out over Hiltonbury and the road to Southampton, the other facing church and schools, so that even at work she was not cut off from her beloved Otterbourne. In the evenings there would be callers on village business, or perhaps a young man come from Winchester to talk over the printing of the Parish Magazine, a publication on which Charlotte bestowed as much care and attention as ever she gave to her novels. That young man never forgot the awe inspired by her handsome and imposing presence, but he remembered too that her voice was low and beautiful, "an excellent thing in woman," and that for all her dignity "she was never a proud lady."

Then, at sunset, work would be put away. Otterbourne relaxed; labourers lit their pipes, children gathered round for a bedtime story, busy housewives sat down with their mending-baskets. But Charlotte was not yet ready to draw her chair cosily up to the fireside. Belated workmen on their way home saw a lantern bobbing across the road and up the churchyard path, and remarked to one another that Miss Yonge was on her way to evensong.

This quiet existence was seldom interrupted by any appearance in public, but in July 1899 the founding of the Charlotte Yonge Scholarship was made the occasion of a remarkable demonstration of affection and loyalty. At the suggestion of Sir Walter Besant the sum of £1900 was collected to found a scholarship in honour of Charlotte, to be awarded every alternate year to a girl from Winchester High School going up to one of the Universities. The passage of time had apparently reconciled Charlotte to the idea of the University education of women.

It was typical of Charlotte that in spite of her age she refused to rest before the great occasion of the presentation. Instead she spent the early part of the afternoon at a gathering of Sunday-school teachers, a duty that no amount of persuasion would induce her to forgo, since she regarded herself "even more in the light of a veteran Sunday-school teacher than in that of an author." Charlotte's behaviour at public functions was always a source of anxiety to those responsible for the success of the occasion for the chilliness of her manner could be enough to damp the most enthusiastic gathering, but even the formidable barrier of her shyness melted a little before the warmth of the welcome that greeted her appearance in the School Hall, appropriately decorated for the occasion with heartsease and daisies. Escorted by Bishop Randall Davidson and followed by Aimé Leroy and Anna Bramston, two of the most faithful of her one-time Goslings, she passed between the rows of excited schoolgirls, a tall, erect figure, dressed in black mantle and plain

black bonnet in startling contrast to her fair complexion and abundant masses of snow-white hair. From her seat of honour on the platform Charlotte listened to the future Archbishop of Canterbury proclaiming his childhood's love for *The Little Duke* and declaring, "I for one thank God I am here today to bear testimony, and to take part in a presentation which comes from loyal hearts to one whom we desire to revere." Every one of her admirers, from the Princess of Wales down to the smallest schoolgirl present, seemed to have joined together to do her honour. The words of the illuminated address presented to her stressed the world-wide nature of her influence and appeal: "From all parts of England and Wales, from Scotland and Ireland, contributions have been sent, so that this scholarship has become the embodiment of the love, admiration, and gratitude which the donors feel for you. From scattered homes in Canada and South Africa, from New Zealand and India, from Australia, the Falkland Islands, and Buenos Aires, as well as from the United States of America, has come the echo of the deep sense of the obligation we owe to you and their wish to share with us the pleasure of being able to express it during your lifetime."

Charlotte had reached her apotheosis. Yet even now as an old and famous woman she was the same bashful, self-conscious creature that she had been as a girl of seventeen. As she rose to reply her hands shook visibly and her admirably phrased expressions of pleasure and gratitude were delivered in a curiously high-pitched voice that quavered with nervousness. A schoolgirl performance of tableaux scenes chosen from her historical stories and ending with a "daisy chain" dance restored her equanimity, but the letter of thanks that she wrote afterwards to the headmistress must have astonished its recipient:

"I am afraid I did not thank you or anyone else for all your kindness to me. I had no notion of all that the function involved; and I fear that I have never outgrown ungracious shyness, which I am often sorry for, and which I am afraid stood in the way of the many introductions. But nothing could have been better managed or more gratifying than the whole, and I can only thank you and your staff and your white band of maidens for one of the prettiest and pleasantest recollections of a lifetime."

It is the letter of a child apologising to its elders for a lack of manners rather than a celebrated author writing politely to a schoolmistress. Charlotte was too diffident to make anything but the most unsatisfactory "lion," to use her own expression, and to the day of her death she was never to outgrow "ungracious shyness".

Yet even in the quiet of Otterbourne Charlotte could not altogether escape her share of "lionising." Inquisitive strangers still haunted the

neighbourhood in hopes of a meeting with the famous authoress. "I have just been informed by a school child that a lady was in church on Sunday who wishes to make acquaintance with me. 'She is a poetess, and has been presented to the Queen and knows Mrs. Baden-Powell.'" A proposal that Christabel Coleridge should write her biography during her lifetime was kindly but firmly rejected: "If I were to be dissected while I am alive I think you would do it tenderly, but indeed I have always shrunk from seeing the lives of living people, and my whole old-fashioned nature revolts at the idea, partly personally, and partly because I know how those who are gone would feel about it." Her fame had spread far and wide; in Germany her books enjoyed an immense popularity, and they had many admirers in the United States. An article in an American Church paper gives a good impression of her in this last period of her life:

"Miss Yonge is one of those attractive literary women who, now age is creeping on, is none the less active in mind and interests. In personal appearance she is tall and handsome, with dark eyes, regular features, and very white hair. Her manner is shy, almost reserved, but when she becomes interested in talking the reserve is cast aside, and she can be delightful. Her consideration for others makes her speak as if it were by accident that she knows more about a subject than others with whom she may be conversing. Her home is one of those houses which reflect the charming tastes of the owner, and her love of books and flowers is evident everywhere. The hall is lined on both sides with blooming plants. . . . On the second floor [*sic*] is the library, a beautiful room filled with books. In fact, every room has a bookcase and there are books in the hall and by the side of the stairs. . . . The idea of being treated as a 'lion' is disliked by Miss Yonge. Her simple, unostentatious nature has neither sought nor courted praise."

This description was published a year before the outbreak of the Boer War. Soldiering was the tradition of the Yonge family; William Yonge had fought at Waterloo, Julian in the Crimea, and now it was the turn of Julian's son. Charlotte, so full of martial ardour in her youth, could bear no mention of the war. Perhaps she had some premonition of loss, a justified foreboding, for it fell to her to erect a tablet in Otterbourne Church commemorating the young man's death in action.

Yet still her spirit was undimmed although the ailments incidental to old age were creeping in upon her. She was working on three books that show her at the age of seventy-seven still true to the ideals and interests of her youth. *The Making of a Missionary*, the last story she wrote for the National Society, proves her interest in missions to be just as keen

as it had been on that great occasion of Bishop Selwyn's visit forty-five years before ; *Modern Broods* bids farewell to her old friends of Beechcroft and Rockstone, Stoneborough and Vale Leston ; and the unfinished *Reasons why I am a Catholic and not a Roman Catholic* restates arguments heard long ago from the lips of John Keble.

One by one Charlotte was drawing together the threads of her long life. As she blotted the last words of *Modern Broods* her mind strayed back to friends even older than the Mays and Mohuns, back to those imaginary "ten boys and eleven girls who lived in an arbour," about whom she could remember nothing "save that two of them were called Caroline and Lucy." She saw herself again as a tiny child in "a little checked cambric tippet with a frill at the throat" rushing out to disport herself among the daffodils. Sometimes it seemed as if time stood still here in Otterbourne so that it was hard to realise that those daffodils had withered seventy-five years ago. Well, spring would soon be back again, bringing with it daffodils once more. And, she hoped too, her dear niece Helen, now on the high seas. Meanwhile, there were still the school-children, granddaughters, some of them, of the Kates and Clemmies of her childhood, and above all, there were the Church services, that daily round of prayer and praise which, though she would speak of it to no one, made the unbreakable framework to the quiet pattern of her life. So, the next day, she was off to church at seven o'clock through the bitter cold of a snowy morning. Spring came late that second year of the new century.

Charlotte had always loved "the glory of the snow." A fortnight later, sparse, unseasonable snowflakes blew again across Otterbourne churchyard, showing white against the mourning black of the school-children and settling incongruously on the spring daffodils which lined an open grave.

EPILOGUE

CHARLOTTE MARY YONGE was buried on the thirty-fifth anniversary of the death of John Keble. Tributes poured in from all over England and from overseas. A Regius Professor of Pastoral Theology preached her memorial sermon, choosing his text with a certain lack of humour: "Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not: for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband." From the august *Times* to the humblest parish magazine, newspapers published long obituary notices which varied in tone from the panegyrical to the patronising. *The Daily Telegraph* lamented that her works must seem old-fashioned and lacking in psychological insight "to those who have been trained in the school of George Egerton and Iota." Forty years later the names of these psychological experts awake but the faintest echoes in the memory. *The Daily News* published the most entertaining and in some ways the most perspicacious of all the obituaries, although the writer was more concerned to be witty than to be truthful. It seems highly unlikely that Charlotte ever wrote "four pages to a distinguished woman of letters who had paid her a visit, the express and sole purpose of the letter being to enquire whether the visitor had dropped a button from her glove." Anonymous correspondents wrote from all over the world pointing out how much they owed to her books, deans and canons discussed suitable memorials, and a proposal was made that she should lie beside Jane Austen in Winchester Cathedral. But her grave was dug at the foot of John Keble's memorial cross, and there she rested, at home in Otterbourne. The outside world soon forgot her, because, with all her admirable literary qualities, she was not a great writer, but the villagers knew and remembered her for what she was, a good woman.

And now, after forty years of comparative neglect, Charlotte Mary Yonge has come into her own once more. Incongruous though it may seem, more and more people are finding relief from the strain of war in the long, ingenuous chronicles written by this Victorian spinster. She was ignorant of the world calamities that are today our daily bread; ignorant also, since she was neither wife nor mother, of the personal dramas which make up the life of the average woman; yet whilst empires crumble and nations stand afraid, dear Miss Yonge remains a

comforter. A great woman, wise in the knowledge of the world and its woes, once remarked, "There is no trouble for which Miss Yonge does not provide consolation." Before the outbreak of war Jane Austen and Charlotte stood side by side on the shelves, but since that Sunday in September it is Charlotte, not Jane, who is taken down again and again in an almost desperate search for sanity. In moments of unbearable strain the greatness of Jane has no meaning; her serene and witty genius stands too far apart from our mad world. But Charlotte, who had neither wit nor genius, can always rest the mind and restore some measure of peace and sanity.

What is her secret? First and foremost, of course, she satisfies the longing to escape. To open one of her books is to be transported into another world, much more pleasant than our own distracted one but no less real. Talking of her characters the enthusiast will say, "I wonder why Harry or Ethel or Felix did this or that?" never, "I wonder why Charlotte made them do it?" These people live and move and have their being in a setting as solid and as familiar as our own homes; were we to be transplanted to Beechcroft or Stoneborough or Vale Leston we should recognise every stick and stone of our surroundings.

This dream world is essentially English in character. Unkind critics might even call it insular. It is the England that we all imagine we knew in our childhood, an England of walled gardens and apple trees and grey village churches, where life moved slowly through a procession of long summer days and firelit winter evenings when chestnuts roasted on the hearth. (In real life, of course, most of the summers, then as now, were wet and chilly, and roast chestnuts were always a disappointing dish.)

" And is there beauty still to find,
And Certainty, and Quiet Kind?
Stands the church clock at ten to three,
And is there honey still for tea ? "

Charlotte Mary Yonge and Rupert Brooke may have had very different conceptions of beauty but they both had a proper appreciation of the importance of tea, preferably with honey sandwiches, whilst Certainty and Quiet Kind flourish much more surely at Stoneborough and Vale Leston than ever at Grantchester.

Certainty is what the world is craving, and certainty Charlotte had in abundance. She knew right from wrong, black from white, duty from desire. Her world, drawn in such concrete detail, was a sure and certain world and no one questioned the foundations on which it rested, least of all Charlotte herself. Ethel May might work to alleviate horrible

conditions at Cocksmoor, Albinia Kendal in *The Young Stepmother* strive to pull down slum houses, but neither of them had any idea of altering the structure of the society which could permit such a state of affairs to exist.

It is easy to laugh, but certainty produces a sense of duty. Too many people do nothing because they do not know what things are worth the doing, but Charlotte's heroes and heroines acted upon the injunction, "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." Her young ladies taught in Sunday school, read pious literature with their maids, visited the sick and fed the hungry without any qualms as to the value of their teaching or the possible evil results of their charity; not for them the paralysing sensation that the foundations of their world were out of course and that to build anything upon them was but lost labour.

Much of Charlotte's peculiar certainty arose from the political and social conditions of the period in which she lived, but its roots lay much deeper. The sense of rest and security pervading all her books is not merely the usual Victorian mixture of roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, of maids in starched caps and aprons, of coal fires and copper cans. Her piety is so naïve in expression that it often provokes laughter, but real piety it is none the less. Even today her books produce a peculiar effect; suddenly the reader is possessed by a most unexpected and disturbing longing, the longing to be good. Charlotte's particular gift is to make ordinary, everyday goodness appear the most exciting thing in the world.

Goodness and godliness are very near akin, and in the achievement of godliness lies certainty. Charlotte was much more than a Victorian period piece; she was a believing Christian. Possessing implicit faith she possessed also the certainty which, among all the changes and chances of this fleeting world, reposes itself upon God's eternal changelessness.

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JOHN YONGE=ELIZABETH
of Puslinch | DUKE

James Yonge=Anne
of Puslinch | Grainger

Rev. Duke Yonge=Catharina
of Cornwall | Crawley

John Yonge=Alethea
of Puslinch | Bargus

Elizabeth=John Colborne
Yonge | 1st Lord Seaton

Duke Yonge=Cordelia
of Antony | Colborne

James
“Jemmy”
“Jimmy”

John
Anne
Duke
Six other
children

Alethea
“Missy”
Other
children

James Yonge, M.D.=Margaret
of Plymouth | Crawley

William=Frances
Yonge | Bargus

Two other
children

“Jemmy”

Charlotte
Mary

William | George | Helen | Alethea=Rev. A. A. | Two
Julian=Frances | Walter | Bowles children

THE YONGE FAMILY TREE

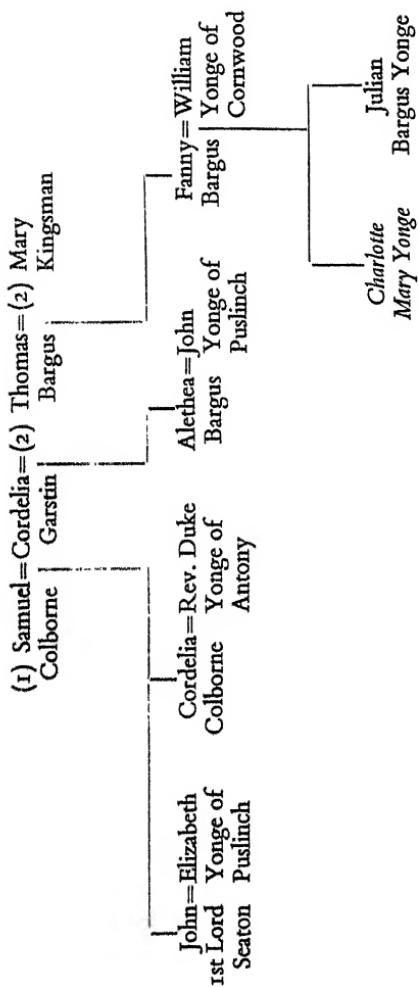


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